

**RAFFLES INSTITUTION  
YEAR 6 GENERAL PAPER (2018)  
STUDENTS' INFORMATION PACKAGE**

**Unit: The Arts**

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## Enduring Understanding(s):

5 What will students understand as a result of this unit?

- **EU1:** Fundamentally, art is an expression of human creativity, and one of its greatest values lie in the intangible socio-psychological benefits it provides to the individual—both artist and audience.
- 10 • **EU2:** Our artistic tendencies are expressed through various branches of creative activity – termed “the arts” – including visual (e.g. painting, sculpture, architecture), performing (theatre, dance and music) and literary arts (poetry, drama and prose).
- 15 • **EU3:** As well, the arts have the ability to capture the thoughts and emotions of a people, society and nation, be it in recollection of the past, showcasing the current societal mood and psyche, or expressing future hopes, thereby playing important roles in history, national identity and culture.
- 20 • **EU4:** There are often parameters placed upon the arts by entities (e.g. the State, religious authorities) due to perceptions that they pose a threat to establishment values and ideologies. Conversely they may be used by these same entities to entrench establish values and ideologies. (*Poss articles e.g. ground-up ‘deviant’ expressions of art in HDB void decks etc*)
- 25 • **EU5:** What is considered art can be highly subjective since it is informed by cultural conditioning, biases and contextual circumstances. Nevertheless, arts practitioners sometimes seek to provoke thought by pushing these boundaries and may, in the process, gain prominence and/or suffer the consequences of this.
- **EU6:** The sustenance and development of the arts requires funding, and investment in them can reap economic and other benefits. This funding however may be limited or inconsistent due to perceptions that the arts are a frivolity and an extravagance.

## 30 Essential Questions:

What are the essential questions of this unit?

- What is art? What purposes does it serve?
- Are some forms of art superior to others?
- 35 • What is the value of the arts to the ordinary man on the street, in our daily lives, and to society at large?

- How and why do entities with power and influence seek to curtail - or use - the arts?
- How, if at all, should governments support the arts? Why so?

## PAST-YEAR EXAMINATION QUESTIONS ON THE ARTS

- 40 • 'Any adaptation of a novel for a film, television or the theatre is never as effective as the original.' Discuss. (Cambridge 2016)
- In your society, to what extent is it acceptable for public money to be used for the acquisition of works of art? (Cambridge 2017)
- 45 • Examine the role of music in establishing a national identity in your society. (Cambridge 2017)
- To what extent should the arts in your society focus on local rather than foreign talent? (Cambridge, 2015)
- 'The progress of a society is sustained by the sciences rather than the arts.' How far do you agree with this statement? (RI Y6 Prelim 2016)
- 50 • 'The arts, such as music and literature, are of no real value to society.' Is this a valid comment? (RI Y6 T2 CT 2016)
- Should the Arts always challenge the status quo? (RI Y5 Promo 2016)
- Is an arts education becoming irrelevant in your society? (RI Y5 T3 CT 2016)
- Does music offer anything more than momentary pleasure? (RI Y5 Promo 2015)
- 55 • 'Different for the sake of being different.' Is this a fair assessment of the arts? (RI Y5 Promo 2015)
- 'The Arts are nothing but mere entertainment.' Is this a fair assessment of the Arts in your society? (RI Y6 T2 CT 2015)
- 'Young people today have no appreciation of art and no taste in music.' Do you agree? (RI Y6 T3 CT 2015)
- 60 • To what extent can Mathematics be considered a form of art? (RI Y6 Prelim 2015)
- 'For the majority of people, the Arts are irrelevant to their daily lives.' How true is this of your society? (Cambridge, 2014)
- Do films offer anything more than an escape from reality? (Cambridge, 2014)
- 65 • 'Unlike the Arts, such as writing or music, Mathematics lacks the capacity for creativity.' How far do you agree with this statement? (Cambridge, 2013)
- 'People in the Arts, living or dead, receive far more recognition than those in the Sciences, even though it is less deserved.' Consider this claim. (Cambridge, 2012)
- 'Only modern architecture and modern art have a place in today's world.' How true is this of your society? (Cambridge, 2011)
- 70

- The book has no place in modern society. Discuss. (Cambridge, 2010)
- Would it matter if all the performing arts venues in your society, such as concert halls and theatres, were closed down? (Camb 2010)
- Are certain types of writing superior to others? (Cambridge, 2009)
- 75 • Fashion is as much a good thing as a bad thing. To what extent do you agree? (Cambridge, 2009)
- 'Contemporary music has no artistic value.' Is this a fair comment? (Cambridge, 2008)
- To what extent is design important in your society? (Cambridge 2008)
- 80 • Do the arts, such as music and literature, really play a significant part in Singaporean society? (Cambridge, 2005)
- Public money should not be wasted on supporting the Arts; they should support themselves.' Discuss. (Cambridge, 2000)
- 'Enjoyable, but ultimately of little practical use.' Consider the value of music or art or literature in the light of this comment. (Cambridge 1998)
- 85 • Consider the significance of theatre in modern society. (RI 2013 Prelims)
- 'The teaching of literary classics should be made compulsory in schools.' Discuss. (RI 2013 Y6 CT1)
- 'The arts cannot change the world, but they make it more beautiful.' Discuss.
- To what extent are the arts important in your society? (RI 2011 J1CT)
- 90 • Is investing in the arts ever worthwhile? Discuss the question with reference to your country. (RJ 2009 J2CT)
- Are the Arts a luxury we should dispense with, especially in difficult economic conditions? (RJ 2009 Promos)
- Should the government promote the arts when only the privileged benefit from it? (RJ 2008 J2 CT)
- 95

**Recommended Websites:**

1. Arts Journal (daily digest): <http://www.artsjournal.com/>
2. The Art Newspaper (international art news): <http://theartnewspaper.com/>
3. Artitude (local and regional art news): <https://www.artitude.com/>
4. The Straits Times Theatre Reviews: <http://www.straitstimes.com/tags/theatre-review>
5. Google Arts and Culture (explore artists, art collections & movements): <https://www.google.com/culturalinstitute/beta/>

**Recommended Local Artistic Works:**

**Films**

- *12 Storeys* (1997) by Eric Khoo
- *7 Letters* (2015), *Singapore Ga Ga* (2005) by Tan Pin Pin

**Graphic Novels**

- *Ten Sticks and One Rice* (2013) by Oh Yong Hwee & Koh Hong Teng
- *The Art of Charlie Chan Hock Chye* (2015) by Sonny Liew

**Recommended Reading (available in Shaw Foundation Library):**

1. *The Art Question*. Nigel Warburton. Routledge (2003) – reliable and accessible introduction to the classic question ‘what is art?’ by a pre-eminent writer of philosophical introductions
2. *Why is that Art?* Terry Barrett. Oxford University Press (2008) – challenging but still readable short, well-illustrated and up to date survey of theories of art
3. *What good are the arts?* John Carey (2005) – partisan and militantly subjectivist, but crisp, readable and entertaining.

## **Article 1a:**

This reading will introduce you to:

- Possible factors that could allow society to determine what art is (intention, quality and response)
- Introduce different perspectives with regard to these factors

**EU1, EU2, EU5**

### **Reading 1(a)**

**What is art?** Since the arts have traditionally claimed a right to our thoughtful attention, we need to spend some time exploring their nature and value. Hence the question “What is art?” In thinking about this question, the real focus of our interest is on what distinguishes worthwhile art from junk. At a practical level, this is an important question because we have limited amounts of time and money and we have to decide what to spend them on. We don’t want to waste our time on junk and we don’t want governments to waste our tax dollars buying junk for the national gallery, or supporting its production.

Most people would agree that for something to be a work of art, it must be man-made. A sunset may be beautiful and the Grand Canyon awe-inspiring, but neither would be called a work of art. Beyond this, opinions differ about what makes something art. We will explore three possible criteria

- The intentions of the artist
- The quality of the work
- The response of spectators

### **Intentions of the Artist**

According to the intention criterion, something is a work of art if it is made by someone with the intention of evoking an aesthetic response in the audience. (**Aesthetics** is a branch of philosophy which studies beauty and the arts.) We naturally think of an artist as wanting to communicate something to us, and communication is a deliberate, intentional activity. A sunset may evoke various emotions in us, but it is not a work of art because it does not intend to have any effect on us. Similarly, if some ants crawling around on a patch of sand happen to trace out what looks like a portrait of Tony Blair, we would not say they had produced a work of art. This is because the portrait is the result of random activity rather than conscious design.

If something is to count as a work of art, then it should not be made with a practical end in mind, but simply with the intention of pleasing or provoking people. You would not describe a manufacturer of pots and pans as an artist because his intention is to produce kitchen utensils rather than works of art. Admittedly, many functional objects also have an aesthetic element built into them, and I prefer attractive and elegant pots and pans to ugly and awkward ones. Nevertheless, there exists a special class of objects that are made with a specifically aesthetic intention, and these are the ones that we properly call works of art.

We can say, then, that works of art differ from natural objects in that they are made with an intention, and they differ from everyday objects in that they are made with the specific intention to please or provoke rather than for some practical end.

### **Criticisms of the Intention Criterion**

Despite the appeal of the intention criterion, some critics have doubted that simply intending something to be art is enough to magically transform it into art. For example, if I take my desk with papers and a half-drunk cup of coffee on it, put it in an art gallery with a glass case around it, and call it Teacher's Work Desk – VIII, is it magically transformed into a work of art simply because I intend it to be so ?

The artist Tracey Emin did something not so different with a work called ***My Bed***, which was exhibited at the Turner Prize exhibition in London in 1999, and which consists of an unmade bed with packets of condoms and a bottle of vodka next to it. (When Emin's work was first exhibited, two art students caused a stir by staging a semi-naked pillow fight on it with the intention, they said, of making it 'more interesting'. They claimed that what they did was itself a work of art, which they called ***Two Naked Men Jump Into Tracey's Bed***. Some years ago, a canny Scotsman called Fife Robertson came up with a name for this kind of thing: he called it PHony ART, or 'phart' for short. Emin's work was eventually bought by the collector Charles Saatchi for 150,000 pounds.)

In his book ***The Culture of Complaint***, the art critic Robert Hughes gives the following amusing example of what happens when art is judged merely by the intentions of the creator with no regard to its quality:

In Holland...the government set up a fund to buy work by artists almost irrespective of how good it was. All that mattered was that they should be alive and Dutch. About 8000 Dutch artists are represented in that collection. None of it is shown and as everyone in Holland except the artists involved now admits, about 98 per cent of it is rubbish. The artists think it's all junk except their own work. The storage, air-conditioning and maintenance expenses are now so high that they have to get rid of the stuff. But they can't. Nobody wants it. You can't give it away. They tried giving it to public institutions, like lunatic asylums and hospitals. But even the lunatic asylums insisted on standards – they wanted to pick and choose. So there it all sits, democratic, non-hierarchical, non-elitist, non-sexist, unsalable and, to the great regret of the Dutch government, only partially bio-degradable.

Taken together, our two criticisms of the intentions criterion suggest that the intentions of the creator are neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for something to be a work of art. They are not necessary because something that was not originally intended as art may now be treated as such; and they are not sufficient because something that is intended as art might simply be junk.

### **Quality of the Work**

The second criterion for distinguishing art from non-art is the intrinsic quality of the work. This criterion is closely connected with the idea of skill. We generally expect an artist to have a high level of technical competence, and feel that an artist should be able to make a good likeness, a musician a pleasing melody, and a poet a well-crafted rhyme. In short, we feel that a work of art should not be something that a person with no talent or training in the arts could have made.

The belief that a work of art should have some kind of intrinsic quality has often been associated with the idea of beauty. Traditionally, it was believed that beautiful art is produced by painting beautiful objects, or by revealing the beauty in everyday objects. But, since we can speak of beauty with respect to the form of a work of art as well as its content, perhaps we should say that a great work of art is a perfect marriage of form and content.

- The content of a work of art is what it depicts – such as a face, a landscape, or a bowl of fruit

- 185       • The form of a work of art concerns the way it is put together, and such things as unity, order, rhythm, balance, proportion, harmony and symmetry are relevant to it.

In fact, a great deal of modern art seems less concerned to produce beautiful things which please the senses than to shock or challenge the viewer. However, you might still feel that if a work of art is to be worthy of our interest it should have some kind of quality which reflects the skill of its creator.

### Criticisms of the Quality Criterion

Despite the appeal of the quality criterion, it is open to criticism. A work of art may, for example, have a great deal of technical competence but lack originality. There are plenty of competent but unoriginal artists churning out impressionist pictures for calendars and greeting cards. Such art is known as **kitsch** – from the German *verkitschen etwas* meaning to ‘knock something off’. Kitsch is basically any form of clinched art. The USA’s ‘most popular painting – is an example of kitsch, as is the music you hear in shopping malls, or the soap operas you see on TV.

The problem of forgeries is also relevant here. Perhaps the most famous forger of paintings was the Dutch artist Han Van Meegeren (1889-1947) who painted some fake Vermeers in the 1930s that fooled the art world and were widely accepted as genuine. (Vermeer was a seventeenth-century Dutch painter). Even after Van Meegeren’s hoax was exposed, some art critics continued to insist that the paintings were genuine! The best-known of Van Meegeren’s ‘Vermeers’, called ***The Disciples at Emmaus***.

The other side of the above point is that a work of art can sometimes show originality, and yet require little technical skill. Consider the bull’s head by Pablo Picasso (1881-1973). The head is made of an old bicycle saddle and a rusty pair of handlebars, and a small child probably could have put it together. Yet for Picasso to see beyond the everyday function of these objects was an astonishing insight and is, in a way, similar to a great writer making a strikingly original metaphor.

To summarize, we can say that quality and skill seem to be neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for something to be a work of art. It is not necessary because works such as Picasso’s Bull’s Head are original but do not require much skill; and it is not sufficient because kitsch and forgeries may require skill but are hardly interesting works of art.

### Response of Spectators

The third criterion for distinguishing between art and non-art is the response of spectators. It might be said that, just as a joke requires someone to laugh at it, so a work of art requires an appreciative spectator in order to complete it. Writers want to be read, painters want exhibitions, and choirs crave an audience.

One of the key questions in thinking about this criterion is which spectators we should appeal to. Since ‘the general public’ usually prefer the familiar to the strange and content to form, they have often been hostile to new artistic movements, and many artists have had little time for their opinions. The poet Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822) once observed that ‘Time reverses the judgement of the foolish crowd’, and there seems to be some truth in this. The 1913 world premiere of Stravinsky’s ***Rite of Spring*** in Paris was booed off stage by the audience, and Picasso’s *Les Femmes d’Alger* (1907) met with shock and outrage from his contemporaries. Both works are now considered to be part of the canon of great works of art.



230 At the same time, we must keep in mind that some artists may have a vested interest in dismissing the opinions of the 'uniformed' public – for the public have the annoying habit of pointing out the absurdities of the more extreme fringes of modern art. An artist may comfort himself with the thought that many new works of art now accepted as great art were originally dismissed as 'rubbish' by the public; but perhaps some of the things the public dismiss as rubbish really are rubbish.

235 At this point, we might appeal to expert opinion to help us to decide which works of art are genuinely worthwhile. Some people think it makes no sense to speak about 'expert opinion' in the arts on the grounds that you cannot argue about matters of taste. But good critics can help you to decide which of the millions of art works available are worth your time and attention; and they can also help you to see things in a work of art that you might otherwise have  
240 overlooked. Indeed, just as a psychoanalyst may reveal things about a person that they are not consciously aware of, so a good critic may understand the meaning of a work of art better than the artist who made the work. Admittedly, experts sometimes disagree in their judgements, but their arguments are usually much more sophisticated than the 'I like it' / 'I don't like it' disagreements of those who do not have any background knowledge.

#### 245 **Other Ideas about the Nature of Art**

Given the difficulties with the above criteria, a simple answer to the question 'what is art?' might be 'art is what is found in an art gallery or treated by experts as a work of art'.

#### **Is Everything Art?**

250 In the early twentieth century, the French artist Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968) began exhibiting what he called 'readymades'. As the name suggests, these were simply objects taken out of their everyday context, renamed, and put in an art gallery. Perhaps the most famous of Duchamp's readymades was his work called *The Fountain*, which was a white porcelain urinal with the pseudonym 'R Mutt' daubed on it.

255 By suggesting that everyday objects might have aesthetic value, Duchamp can be seen as raising the question of where art ends and non-art begins. Taking our cue from Duchamp, we might be tempted to say that if we just opened our eyes we would see that everything is art. But if we say that everything is art, then the word 'art' is in danger of losing its meaning because it no longer distinguishes some things from other things. Just as 'high' only means something relative to 'not-high', so 'art' only means something relative to 'non-art'.

260 Instead of saying that everything is art we could perhaps rescue the above idea by saying that everything can be looked at from an aesthetic point of view. When something is put in an art gallery, that is precisely the way we are invited to look at it. Thus, while an unmade bed in a hotel room is unlikely to engage your aesthetic interest, if you put a glass case round it and put it in an art gallery, you will stop looking at it as a purely functional object, and this might  
265 set in motion the wheels of thought and feeling... But then again it might not! After all, just because something is in an art gallery does not necessarily mean that it is worthy of our interest. **Inexhaustibility** Perhaps the distinguishing feature of a great work of art is that it is inexhaustible in the sense that every time you come back to it you discover new things in it. A related idea is that great works of art stand the test of time and speak across generations and  
270 cultures. There is, for example, something extraordinary about the fact that Sophocles' play *Oedipus Rex* can move us with the same power and intensity that it moved Athenian audiences two and a half thousand years ago. Indeed, it could be argued that the winnowing effects of time act as a kind of ideal spectator helping us to distinguish enduring art from art which is merely fashionable.

**Reading 1(b)****Ways of Defining Art**

*Lisa Marder, excerpted from ThoughtCo.com (updated August 16, 2017)*

There is no one universal definition of art but there is general consensus that art is the conscious creation of something beautiful or meaningful using skill and imagination. But art is subjective, and the definition of art has changed throughout history and in different cultures. The Jean Basquiat painting that sold for \$110.5 million at Sotheby's auction in May 2017, would no doubt have had trouble finding an audience in Renaissance Italy, for example.

Extreme examples aside, every time a new movement in art has developed, the definition of what is art, or what is acceptable as art, has been challenged. This is true in any of the different forms of art, including literature, music, dance, theatre, and the visual arts. For the sake of clarity, this article pertains primarily to the visual arts.

**ETYMOLOGY**

"Art" is related to the Latin word "ars" meaning, art, skill, or craft. The first known use of the word *art* comes from 13th century manuscripts. However, the word *art* and its many variants (*artem*, *earth*, etc) have probably existed since the founding of Rome.

**PHILOSOPHY OF ART**

The question of what is art has been debated for centuries among philosophers." What is art?" is the most basic question in the philosophy of aesthetics, which really means, "how do we determine what is defined as art?" This implies two subtexts: the essential nature of art, and its social importance (or lack of it).

The definition of art has generally fallen into three categories: representation, expression, and form. Plato first developed the idea of art as "mimesis," which, in Greek, means copying or imitation, thus making representation or replication of something that is beautiful or meaningful the primary definition of art.

This lasted until roughly the end of the eighteenth century and helped to assign value to a work of art. Art that was more successful in replicating its subject was a stronger piece of art. As Gordon Graham writes, "It leads people to place a high value on very lifelike portraits such as those by the great masters – Michelangelo, Rubens, Velázquez and so on – and to raise questions about the value of 'modern' art – the cubist distortions of Picasso, the surrealist figures of Jan Miro, the abstracts of Kandinsky or the 'action' paintings of Jackson Pollock." While representational art still exists today, it is no longer the only measure of what is art.

Expression became important during the Romantic movement with artwork expressing a definite feeling, as in the sublime or dramatic. Audience response was important, for the

35 artwork was intended to evoke an emotional response. This definition holds true today, as artists look to connect with and evoke responses from their viewers.

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) was one of the most influential of the early theorists toward the end of the 18th century. He was considered a formalist in terms of his philosophy, which meant that he believed that art should not have a concept but should be judged alone on its formal qualities, that the content of a work of art is not of aesthetic interest.

40 Formal qualities became particularly important when art became more abstract in the 20th century, and the principles of art and design - terms such as balance, rhythm, harmony, unity - were used to define and assess art.

Today, all three modes of definition come into play in determining what is art, and its value, depending on the artwork being assessed.

## 45 **HISTORY OF HOW ART IS DEFINED**

According to H.W Janson, author of the classic art textbook, the *History of Art*, "It would seem...that we cannot escape viewing works of art in the context of time and circumstance, whether past or present. How indeed could it be otherwise, so long as art is still being created all around us, opening our eyes almost daily to new experiences and thus forcing us to adjust our sights?"

Throughout the centuries in Western culture from the 11th century on through the end of the 17th century, the definition of art was anything done with skill as the result of knowledge and practice.

55 This meant that artists honed their craft, learning to replicate their subjects skillfully. The epitome of this occurred during the Dutch Golden Age when artists were free to paint in all sorts of different genres and made a living off their art in the robust economic and cultural climate of 17th century Netherlands.

60 During the Romantic period of the 18th century, as a reaction to the Enlightenment and its emphasis on science, empirical evidence, and rational thought, art began to be described as not just being something done with skill, but something that was also created in the pursuit of beauty and to express the the artist's emotions. Nature was glorified, and spirituality and free expression were celebrated. Artists, themselves, achieved a level of notoriety and were often guests of the aristocracy.

65 The Avant-garde art movement began in the 1850s with the realism of Gustave Courbet. It was followed by other modern art movements such as cubism, futurism, and surrealism, in which the artist pushed the boundaries of ideas and creativity. These represented innovative approaches to art making and the definition of what is art expanded to include the idea of originality of vision.

70 The idea of originality in art persists, leading to ever more genres and manifestations of art, such as digital art, performance art, conceptual art, environmental art, electronic art, etc.

## Article 1c:

EU5

This reading will introduce you to:

- The perspectives of artists, critics and others as to what art means to them.
- Prime you into thinking and forming your own opinion of what art is, and its relative importance to different peoples and societies.

## 22 Responses to the Question “What is Art?” (excerpt)

By Judith B Herman

To Plato, art was imitation of nature, but in the 19th century, photography took over that function, and in the 20th, abstract art overturned the whole notion that art was about representation. And although art meant skill early on, conceptual artists elevated ideas over execution. So what is art? Does it have to be beautiful? Expressive? Original? Uplifting? Intellectual? Here's how 22 artists, critics, and others answered the question, "What is art?"

Art is...

### ...ACCORDING TO A DICTIONARY:

[from the 1300s] Skill; its display, application, or expression... [from the 1600s] The expression or application of creative skill and imagination, typically in a visual form such as painting, drawing, or sculpture, producing works to be appreciated primarily for their beauty or emotional power.-- *Oxford English Dictionary Online*

### ...IMITATION OR CREATION?

Art is the unceasing effort to compete with the beauty of flowers – and never succeeding.– [Marc Chagall](#) (1887–1985) Russian-French artist, remark, 1977

The imitator is a poor kind of creature. If the man who paints only the tree, or flower, or other surface he sees before him were an artist, the king of artists would be the photographer.– [James McNeill Whistler](#) (1834–1903), American-born, British-based artist, *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies* (1890)

Art is either a plagiarist or a revolutionary.– [Paul Gauguin](#), (1848–1903), Peruvian-born French artist, quoted in *Huneker, The Pathos of Distance* (1913)

### ...CREATING BEAUTY OR HARMONY

Filling a space in a beautiful way. That's what art means to me. – [Georgia O'Keeffe](#) (1887–1986), American painter, in *Art News* December 1977

Art is harmony.– [Georges Seurat](#) (1859–1891), French painter, letter to Maurice Beaubourg (1890)

### ...SOMETHING THAT REVEALS THE ESSENTIAL OR HIDDEN TRUTH

To me the thing that art does for life is to clean it – to strip it to form.– [Robert Frost](#) (1874–1963), *American poet, in Fire and Ice: The Art and Thoughts of Robert Frost*, by Lawrence Thompson (1942)

- 30 Art does not reproduce the visible; rather, it makes visible. – [Paul Klee](#) (1879–1940), Swiss painter, *The Inward Vision* (1959)

We all know that Art is not truth. Art is a lie that makes us realize truth.– [Pablo Picasso](#) (1881–1973), *Spanish painter living in France, quoted in Dore Ashton's Picasso on Art* (1972)

### 35 ...THOUGHT EXPRESSED THROUGH FORM (OR NOT)

To give a body and a perfect form to one's thought, this—and only this—is to be an artist. – [Jacques-Louis David](#) (1748–1825), *French painter, in Jacques-Louis David*, by Anita Brooker (1980)

- 40 Ideas alone can be works of art....All ideas need not be made physical....A work of art may be understood as a conductor from the artist's mind to the viewer's. But it may never reach the viewer, or it may never leave the artist's mind. – [Sol LeWitt](#) (1928–2007), *American artist, "Sentences on Conceptual Art," in Art and Its Significance*, edited by Stephen David Ross (1994)

### ...A SOURCE OF CALM IN A CHAOTIC WORLD

- 45 What I dream of is an art of balance, of purity and serenity, devoid of troubling or depressing subject matter, an art which could be for every mental worker, for the businessman as well as the man of letters, for example, a soothing, calming influence on the mind, something like a good armchair which provides relaxation from physical fatigue. – [Henri Matisse](#) (1869–1954), *French artist, Notes of a Painter* (1908)

### 50 ...POLITICAL

I don't think art is elite or mysterious. I don't think anybody can separate art from politics. The intention to separate art from politics is itself a very political intention.– [Ai Weiwei](#) (1957-), *Chinese artist, "Shame on Me," in Der Spiegel, November 21, 2011.*

### ...SELF-EXPRESSION OR AUTOBIOGRAPHY

- 55 What is art? Art grows out of grief and joy, but mainly grief. It is born of people's lives. – [Edvard Munch](#) (1863–1944), *Norwegian artist, in Edvard Munch: The Man and His Art*, by Ragna Stang (1977)

All art is autobiographical; the pearl is the oyster's autobiography. – [Federico Fellini](#) (1920–1993), *Italian film director, in Atlantic Monthly, December 1965*

### 60 ...COMMUNICATION OF FEELINGS

To evoke in oneself a feeling one has experienced, and...then, by means of movements, lines, colors, sounds or forms expressed in words, so to transmit that feeling—this is the activity of art. – [Leo Tolstoy](#) (1828–1910), *Russian author, What is Art?* (1890)

- 65 Art has to move you and design does not, unless it's a good design for a bus. – [David Hockney](#) (1937–) British artist, to *The Guardian* on October 26, 1988

### ...AN ADDICTION

Art is a habit-forming drug. – [Marcel Duchamp](#), (1887–1968), French-born American artist, quoted in *Richter, Dada: art and anti-art* (1964)

### ...AN ATTEMPT AT IMMORTALITY

- 70 Ars longa, vita brevis. (Life is short, art is long). – [Hippocrates](#) (c.460–357 BC), Greek physician, *Aphorisms* sect. 1, para. 1 (translated by W. H. S. Jones)

Art is a revolt, a protest against extinction. – [André Malraux](#) (1901–1976), French novelist, essayist, and art critic, *Les Voix du silence* (1951)

### ...WHATEVER IS DISPLAYED IN A MUSEUM OR GALLERY

- 75 [In 1917, Marcel Duchamp, using the pseudonym R. Mutt, submitted a store-bought urinal, which he titled “Fountain,” to an art exhibition.] Whether Mr. Mutt with his own hands made the fountain or not has no importance. He chose it. He took an ordinary article of life, placed it so that its useful significance disappeared under a new title and point of view (and) created a new thought for the object. – [Marcel Duchamp](#), [Beatrice Wood](#), and [Henri-Pierre Roché](#),  
80 *The Blind Man*, 2nd issue (May 1917)

If one general statement can be made about the art of our times, it is that one by one the old criteria of what a work of art ought to be have been discarded in favor of a dynamic approach in which everything is possible – [Peter Selz](#) (1919– ) German-born American art historian, *Art in Our Times* (1981)

- 85 **Sources:** [en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Ai\\_Weiwei](http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Ai_Weiwei); *Art and Its Significance*; *Concise Oxford Dictionary of Art Terms* (2 ed.); *Crofton, Dictionary of Art Quotations*; *La Cour, Artists in Quotation*; [Oxford Essential Quotations](#); *Gabrielle Selz, Unstill Life*.

#### **Reflection Questions**

What common points emerge in readings 1a and 1b?

Across the 3 articles, which definitions of art do you agree with and why?

#### **Possible Activity**

Select a work that has been (controversially or otherwise) deemed as Art and discuss the rationale behind this assertion. Do you agree with the assertion, and why?

#### **For discussion:**

- 1) ‘The arts cannot change the world but they make it more beautiful.’ Discuss.
- 2) ‘Enjoyable, but ultimately of little practical use.’ Consider the value of music or art or literature in the light of this comment. (Cambridge 1998)

## **The Purpose of Art**

Art, let us say, is the effective organisation of experience into integrated forms which are emotionally significant and aesthetically satisfying. This includes some of the practice and some of the products of activities like painting and sculpture, literature and drama, dance and ritual celebration, music and architecture. But, of course, in the spectrum of all of these activities art slips over into non-art, for example literature grades into - straightforward information and into propaganda. The essential distinctness of art, I would say, is that it provides a qualitative enrichment of life, by creating a diversity of new experience.

For one thing, art can tap emotional resources of human personality which might otherwise remain unutilised, either individually or socially. It is a process of extending ourselves, through our sensibilities and our imagination, to something we have not reached before. It is a process of discovery about ourselves and about life. Art helps us to assimilate the experience provided by our senses and our emotions.

But although art is in general a process of differentiation and proliferates variety, it is in particular a process of integration and synthesis; any work of art, however humble, brings together a number of separate (and sometimes apparently disparate) elements and moulds them into an organic unity.

Art can exert the most profound effects on the minds of men. To many people poetry or painting or music have conveyed an overwhelming sense of revelation. At the play, we can be "purged by pity and fear" or gripped by powerful and liberating collective emotion, and many people have found their first visit to the theatre was also their induction into a new and compelling mode of experience. We are not quite the same after we have read Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. And Beethoven's posthumous quartets can transport us to another world, make us free of another realm of being.

That is the point. Art opens the doors of that other world in which matter and quantity are transformed by mind and quality. Art is sometimes contemptuously dismissed as escapism. But we all need escape. Apart from our modern need to escape from the dullness of routine and from the over-mechanised life of cities, there is the universal and permanent need to escape from the practical and actual present in which we have of necessity to spend so much of our lives, and above all from the prison of our single and limited selves.

The artist can utilise intellectual ideas and moral concepts among the raw materials which he organises, thus transmuting reason and morality into art and giving a further dimension to his work. In painting, we need only think of the concepts of maternity and divinity in pictures of the Madonna and Child. Inferior artists will be incapable of organising these non-aesthetic elements into an aesthetic unity, and their work will not rise above the didactic or the propagandist, the moralistic or the merely representational. But the good artist can fuse them into a richer whole in the creative crucible of his imagination.

The idea that art is in some way equitable with beauty, or is confined to the creation of beauty, is still widespread, though its fallacy has often been demonstrated. What art creates is significance - emotionally and aesthetically effective significance.

*Sir Julian Huxley (adapted)*

**Points to Ponder / For Discussion**

- Summarise what the purposes of art are, to the individual and to the society.
- Which of these purposes resound most with you, and why?
- Which of these purposes do you consider particularly relevant to your society? Why?

**Essay Questions**

1. 'For the majority of people, the Arts are irrelevant to their daily lives.' How true is this of your society? (Cambridge, 2014)
2. Would it matter if all the performing arts venues in your society, such as concert halls and theatres, were closed down? (Cambridge, 2010)
4. To what extent is design important in your society? (Cambridge 2008)
5. To what extent are the arts important in your society? (RI 2011 J1CT)

**For discussion:**

- 3) 'The arts cannot change the world but they make it more beautiful.' Discuss.
- 4) 'Enjoyable, but ultimately of little practical use.' Consider the value of music or art or literature in the light of this comment. (Cambridge 1998)



## **Reading 2(b)**

### **Infosheet on Different Functions of the Arts**

#### **1. The arts create beauty**

- At times, artists look to nature as the standard of beauty and imitate it. At other times, artists aim to improve upon nature and develop an alternate standard or idealised form.
- The classical Greeks were obsessed with their idea of beauty and created mathematical formulas to recreate the human body in sculpture to achieve perfection unknown in nature. 'God from the sea' (c. 470BC) is a bronze sculpture that portrays the body that is charged with divine power, yet is wholly human in form.
- Leonardo da Vinci's 'Mona Lisa' portrays eternal beauty and mystery – a study of beauty that is shaped by Western standards.
- Beauty is also evidenced in the famous ballet, 'Swan Lake' by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, or its modern adaptation by South African dancer-choreographer Dada Masilo, which incorporates classical ballet steps such as arabesques with rhythmic swaying and stomping characteristic of African dance styles. The beauty of 'Swan Lake' lies in its balance of the concepts of light and dark through its choreography and music, and the metaphorical meaning embedded in its dual role of Odette and Odile fleshed out through technically demanding dance steps, especially the ballet's famed 32 fouettées in Act III.
- 'The Unicorn Tapestries' (c. 1500) were commissioned at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century as a wedding present to Anne of Brittany and King Louis XII. The tapestries are up to 12 feet tall and 14 feet wide and are woven from a rich palette of wools and silks, highlighted by silver threads. They are considered to be the most beautiful tapestries in existence, and their value incalculable.

#### **2. The arts reflect social and political sentiments of the times**

- The arts can be used to replicate reality in the finest detail as seen in the art works of the ancient Greeks; 'Madonna and Child' by Bernardo Daddi; Chua Mia Tee's 'National Language Class'.
- However, artists can also use their works to reveal shame and outrage as a commentary on truths about themselves or about humanity to inform their audience or influence them to take action. Here, the artist serves as an interpreter of tumultuous and confusing happenings in the world, creating avenues for people to see the world's problems from different perspectives.
- Mexican painter, Frida Kahlo's works reveal tragedy in her life through her realist depiction of her face, set within a compressed space, requiring the audience to confront her true self ('Diego and I').
- Francisco Goya's brutal and moving masterpiece, 'The Third of May 1808' portrays the horrors of war and how it brings out the basest human instincts. His depiction of Spanish freedom fighters rounded up and massacred by the French during France's occupation of Spain is a visual indictment against Napoleon, expressing themes of human cruelty and repression.
- Henrik Ibsen's play, 'A Doll's House', is a critique of the situation in many upper-middle class Norwegian families in his time, where a woman's sole purpose was tied to her duties and responsibilities to her husband and children. Nora (the female protagonist) leaving

her family at the end of the play can be seen as an attempt to shock the audience into confronting the repression felt by women at that time.

### 3. The arts record and commemorate experience

- From humanity's earliest days, art has served to record and communicate experience and events. From prehistoric cave paintings thought to record significant events in the history of Paleolithic societies to war memorials installed to honour bravery and courage, art has been used to inform future generations of what and who had gone before them.
- PictureSG is a project helmed by the National Library Board featuring a collection of photographs and artworks that chart Singapore's cultural, geographical, historical and sociological development.
- Kelly Tang's 'Concerto in Three Movements' was commissioned to celebrate Singapore's Golden Jubilee and was performed by pianist Lang Lang. Each of the 3 movements pays tribute to Singapore's past, present and future. To capture the idea of multiculturalism, the third movement is characterised by Asian music influences and uses traditional folksong Geylang Si Paku Geylang as its main theme.
- Louisa Chase, an American artist, tempers her paintings of waves, waterfalls and thunderstorms with her own presence in them. In 'Storm', a thick cluster of black clouds lets go a torrent of rain, which, turns an artificial blue. Beneath the delicate ferns spiraling upward on the right side of the canvas is her hand cupping the raindrops, signifying her participation in nature's event.
- Photographer Alfred Stieglitz captures the tenacious human spirit of immigrants entering New York harbour in 'The Steerage'.

### 4. The arts capture or explore national identity

- The arts, which allow creative exploration of themes through techniques and resources unique to different art forms, help the audience capture a sense of identity, which entrenches idea of nationhood. Music, plays, novels draw on varied elements that represent their country of origin, borrowing native folksongs, capturing ideas that convey the national psyche.
- In response to the many political upheavals in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, many European composers developed a nationalistic style that defined their own countries. Antonin Dvorak, a Czech composer of classical music infused rhythms and folksongs in his 9 symphonies. He dedicated the 3<sup>rd</sup> movements of many of these symphonies to the music of Moravia and Bohemia.
- Poems like 'Forever Singlish' by Leong Liew Geok, 'Starfruit' by Grace Chia, 'Upgrading' by Alvin Pang; plays like 'Emily of Emerald Hill' by Stella Kon, 'Cook a Pot of Curry' by Alfian Sa'at subject Singapore's national fabric and identity as a people to scrutiny. Singapore writer Suchen Christine Lim said, "Reading the literature of a country is like listening to its heartbeat. One hears the hopes, fears and angst of ordinary folks like you and me."

### 5. The arts protest injustice and raise social/political consciousness

- Many artists struggle against injustices of their times and have employed creative means to persuade others to join their causes. According to artist and designer, Olafur Eliasson,

the transformative experience offered by the arts – their ability to move their audience and transport them to a new place – can help people to understand difficult issues and feel them emotionally and physically.

- Polish artist Krzysztof Wodiczko's 'Projection on the Martin Luther Kirche', a slide image of a praying figure in gloves and a protective suit projected at a massive scale on the façade of the Martin Luther Church in Kassel, Germany, focuses the audience's attention on environmental pollution and toxic waste.
- Pablo Picasso's 'Guernica', a mural-sized oil painting is a powerful political statement painted as a strong and immediate reaction to the Nazi's bombing of the Basque town of Guernica during the Spanish Civil War. The painting has come to symbolise anti-war sentiments.
- Singaporean playwright, Tan Tarn How's 'Fear of Writing', which centres on the difficulty of writing political plays in Singapore, puts under the spotlight the commercialisation of theatre and how complacency has undermined its potential as an engine of change. He said, "Artists are supposed to hold a mirror to society. An artist is supposed to have a conversation, not with himself, but with society."

#### 6. The arts serve to meet the needs of the artist

- Psychologist, Abraham Maslow, spoke of a hierarchy of needs, with self-actualisation representing growth of an individual towards fulfilling one's unique potential. This would refer to the need for novelty, exploration, understanding and the pursuit of big questions such as the meaning of life. Jose Clemente Orozco's 'Epic of American Civilisation: Hispano-America' is a series of murals created from a federal work-relief programme intended to help workers survive the Great Depression. In Orozco's example, his murals served to meet his basic needs of food and shelter and also enabled him to express his outrage at the financial and military injustices imposed upon Mexican peasants.
- The arts serve as a platform for people to channel and fulfil these needs, both as creators of the arts and as the audience perceiving artworks created by others. This can be seen in the use of art therapy where the creative process of artmaking is used to improve a person's physical, emotional and mental well-being.

This reading will help you:

- Examine how the Arts can have a transformative effect on a nation, not only economically, but socially and politically.

## The Role of the Arts in making a Nation Home

Paul Tan, June 4, 2017, The Straits Times

*Art can root young Singaporeans to their land and, through the imagination, anchor them to their forebears*

One of the most abiding memories in my leisure travels is visiting the small islands in the Seto Inland Sea of Japan. This is a clutch of islands in a rural part of Japan in between the city of Okayama and the large island of Shikoku. Previously an under-the-radar destination among art aficionados, these isles have in recent years become popular with general tourists looking for a unique experience focused on art and culture, coupled with the assurance of quality Japanese hospitality and cuisine.

What struck me on my brief visit to that region was how art has been integrated into these islands and how this process has been instrumental in revitalising local communities. These were islands which faced a raft of problems - depopulation, the loss of a farming economy and even environmental degradation.

Today, there are small museums, public art installations and art trails found everywhere - particularly on the islands of Naoshima, Teshima and Shodoshima - and old buildings and industrial sites have been repurposed to house fascinating and visually arresting artwork.

Anyone who has visited the islands would have interacted with elderly island residents acting as docents in arts spaces, or serving in cafes and bed-and-breakfast establishments.

When one reflects on the local history of these islands, it is nothing short of amazing how art has activated all typologies of spaces and brought back life to the region, generating economic activity and bringing a sense of purpose and optimism to the local communities.

Given the charge that contemporary art is an elite enterprise which alienates the average man on the street, there is something refreshing in hearing an elderly local - possibly a farmer in an earlier part of his life - explain how one could interact with an artwork.

### ADVERTISING

The islands also play host to a well-regarded contemporary arts festival, the Setouchi Triennale, which sees temporary site-specific artwork installed across the islandscape. First organised in 2010 and running for about eight months each time, the Triennale was last held last year.

With the support of the National Arts Council (NAC), Singapore's independent arts centre The Substation and artist Grace Tan took part in the 2013 edition of this visual arts festival. Grace Tan's work, titled *In The Stillness*, transformed a classroom in a defunct school on Shodoshima with a huge cloud-like sculpture made of two million polypropylene loop pins. (These are the plastic bits you see in a department store which attach price tags to apparel.)

Artist Grace Tan's work, *In The Stillness*, transformed a classroom in a defunct school on Shodoshima with a cloud-like sculpture made of two million polypropylene loop pins.

Grace, who spent about three weeks in Japan, described how the work was constructed with the help of volunteers from Fukuda town, involving residents ranging from kindergarten and high school students to nursing home residents. They would spend time creating the sculpture bit by bit in the community centre or at other local sites, drinking tea and sharing local snacks. Grace spoke of the warm ties that resulted from time spent together and how the completed work attracted Triennale visitors, who also got to enjoy the food specially prepared in the makeshift cafe within the defunct school. (Parallel to the art-making were workshops which taught local residents how to cook South-east Asian dishes, such as chicken rice and prawn noodles.)

For us to deepen the level of arts appreciation, there is the need for the arts to be relevant or accessible for first-timers, with the aim of helping them build a foundation of understanding and importantly, a love for the arts. This must be the only sustainable way to broaden the base of Singaporean audiences, readers and art collectors in the long term.

It is heartening that a Singapore artist like Grace can create work which resonates on so many levels, in both critical reception and social outcomes. It is a reminder of the power of good art. I suspect though, that in all likelihood, such broadly transformative arts projects are more the exceptions than the norm, across the globe.

### **DIVERSITY IN ART**

As the agency that champions the arts, NAC has to acknowledge that art in Singapore is created with different artistic intentions for diverse audiences. Singapore is a modern cosmopolitan country with a multi-ethnic, multi-religious heritage. This means we have artistic traditions that go back centuries as well as an open attitude towards external ideas. For sure, these circumstances create for a complex art-making and reception in a relatively young nation. Borrowing the lingo from the marketing world, one could say that the potential consumer base for the arts in Singapore can be divided into discrete describable segments. Each segment has different attitudes and expectations of the arts, responds to different stimuli and thus, needs to be addressed differently, if NAC wants Singaporeans to embrace the arts. Our most recent population survey in 2015 revealed that while eight in 10 Singaporeans attended an arts event, in reality, only four in 10 expressed an interest in the arts. It could mean, I remarked to colleagues in a moment of levity, that half the people who encountered the arts in 2015 - perhaps a free performance or exhibition in a public space - were dragged there reluctantly by family members, or had experienced the arts "accidentally" on a weekend errand run.

The statistics underline the fact that the appreciation of the arts is in its nascent state in Singapore. But when taken together with the upward trend of important indicators, it gives us in NAC some comfort. Things can only get better in the longer term.

This is especially so when we consider today's opportunities for arts exposure in our public schools. There is also increasing recognition that young people should chase their dreams and that there are many possible pathways to become a contributing member of society.

### **ART FOR ALL AUDIENCES AND AGES**

For today's artists, there is little doubt that the base of interested audiences and arts appreciators (the four in 10 Singaporeans) is indeed a varied one. For every serious collector of conceptual art who visits international art fairs and enjoys in-depth discourse about art, there is someone who derives an uncomplicated aesthetic pleasure from a beautiful watercolour painting.

For every audience member who is willing to shell out top dollar for a hard-hitting stage drama on a difficult topic, there is someone who is happy to hear beautifully harmonised pop songs, reprised from her youth.

For every reader of serious poetry and follower of the vibrant literary scene, there is a parent hunting for accessible children's stories for his mobile-device addicted child.

85 With this demographic diversity - which we at NAC are trying to understand better - as well as the variety of art forms practised here, NAC's support of the arts needs to be multi-dimensional. We will need to cater to audiences who are encountering the arts for the first time as much as we need to champion artists who are presenting art which well-informed arts lovers expect of a global cultural city.

90 For us to deepen the level of arts appreciation, there is a need for the arts to be relevant or accessible for first-timers, with the aim of helping them build a foundation of understanding and importantly, a love for the arts. This must be the only sustainable way to broaden the base of Singaporean audiences, readers and art collectors in the long term.

95 Fortunately, there are many artists in Singapore like Grace who can develop work which can be accessed at different levels and who are interested to reach out to the community in the process of artistic creation. There are also many seasoned programmers, curators, and producers who know how to build bridges between the artwork and the audience, who know how to mediate that tricky space between artistic intention and critical reception. We can do more in this area, for sure.

### **PUSHING BOUNDARIES AND POSING AWKWARD QUESTIONS**

100 While we have said Singapore's arts scene is still relatively young, there is no denying that the last decade has seen a dynamic growth in the range and quality of cultural offerings.

105 There is a plethora of quality art which reflects our diverse communities, recognises our local contexts and poses thoughtful questions. We have, for instance, enjoyed theatre that uses humour to talk about integration of new immigrants, experienced installation art that expresses the hope of prisoners waiting for their day of release, and read poetry that mourns the loss of local landmarks and captures a forgotten way of life. This vibrant scene has not gone unnoticed internationally, with both international tourists and expatriates appreciating the sea change.

110 At the same time, there is a need to remember that art is not about the lowest common denominator. We cannot assess the merit of the arts based on the numbers of audiences, or exhibition attendees, or book sales. If we did, we would not support poetry, vernacular theatre, experimental performance art, or contemporary dance. Niche, we should not be shy to declare, is not a bad word in itself.

115 Of course, some Singaporeans will like their art immediate, not taxing or overly cerebral. They just want a good evening out after a demanding work day, or a stress-free excursion during the weekend with the children in tow. We have to respect that art serves that role too, and NAC must strongly support such endeavours.

In the same breath, it also needs to be said that we must also continue to support artwork that challenge boundaries or pose awkward questions. We should not be afraid.

120 If a play pokes fun at us as Singaporeans, may we have the grace to laugh it off, recognise our foibles and think about the merit of the critique.

125 If a piece of music sounds strange at the first listening, or a novel seems too difficult in the first few pages, may we have the patience to persist a little longer and give the artist that consideration. If we do not like any work in the end, may we have the generosity not to generalise all home-grown artwork.

Such works do reflect the polyphony of artistic voices in Singapore, even if at an individual level, we may not take a shine to some of these works. More often than not, they are unique

to our island and collectively express perspectives on life here, ultimately adding to and enriching our growing national canon.

130 Singapore would be poorer if we did not support such art forms.

## **ART IN MAKING A COUNTRY HOME**

My wish for the next few years is to see more arts in the heartland and for artists to keep creating works which have universal appeal but are yet locally anchored and to showcase more works that welcome multiple responses.

135 Critically, I hope to see more Singaporeans who understand that art, in all its forms and voices, is relevant to their lives, their sense of self and their well-being. When that happens, there would be greater recognition of the role of the artist in society, including a ready willingness to support the arts as patrons, collectors, ticket-buyers and volunteers.

140 With the present uncertainty in global geopolitics and gloomy talk of protracted slow growth, there should also be a recognition, however unquantifiable it may seem, that an appreciation of and participation in the arts too have a part to play in the future economy of this island. The creative mind does not belong only to the artist. An engaged arts lover will have the intellectual curiosity and nimbleness of a creative disposition: An individual who can imagine broader horizons and may be better able to respond to challenges created by the "disruptions"

145 that we see in the market today.

In this age of global connectivity and unprecedented movement of peoples, some have responded to the accompanying anxieties by looking inward or raising barriers. Singapore, as a port city and trading hub that has prospered by being open to ideas and people, cannot afford to do that.

150 While we must be careful of placing too much emphasis on the instrumental role of the arts, the truth is that the artwork being created in Singapore are uniquely placed to speak to our citizens and residents. They can capture, channel and reimagine the lives of residents in a way that an imported Broadway musical or a work by an international writer cannot. The understanding and connections forged by such art can indeed be a bulwark against the

155 vicissitudes of uncertain times or the anxieties of a borderless cyber world.

What art can do is to root the young Singaporean who is still finding his or her voice and provide a link, through the imagination, to his or her forebears and a physical landscape that has been lost.

160 It can also create a sense of empathy for the people we encounter in our midst - from the unhappy domestic worker to the newly retrenched office manager or the child from a new immigrant family.

At the end of the day, what makes a country home? The answer must lie beyond physical trappings, gleaming buildings and state-of-the-art infrastructure.

165 The bedrock of that home must be in its social fabric - its people, the relationships they have with each other and the experiences they build in the common spaces they share. The arts and culture form a vital part of this fabric and there is so much potential yet unlocked.

On the one hand, Singaporeans can remember the lump in the throat when an entire stadium sings in unison to Cultural Medallion recipient Dick Lee's song *Home*.

- 170 But what else is out there? What artwork can articulate what we know, remember and treasure about our world; capture the struggles and milestones of a young nation; and ultimately, help us see ourselves and the world beyond? What new visions of the future can inspire us?

If we want a glimpse of the answers, we should all support our artists as they imagine those possibilities and together celebrate the works they create.

- 175 *The writer is the deputy CEO of the National Arts Council and a published poet.  
This essay was first published in Cultural Connections Vol 2 May 2017, an annual publication by The Culture Academy Singapore.*

#### **Discussion Questions**

- “There is no denying that the last decade has seen a dynamic growth in the range and quality of cultural offerings.” (ln 100) What might be some reasons contributing to such a trend in the local arts scene?
- “...the artwork being created in Singapore are uniquely placed to speak to our citizens and residents.” (ln 151) What would be some examples of such works and in what ways do they especially speak to our citizens and residents”?

#### **Essay Questions**

1. Do the arts, such as music and literature, really play a significant part in Singaporean society? (Cambridge, 2005)
2. To what extent are the arts important in your society? (RI 2011 J1CT)
3. Do films offer anything more than an escape from reality? (Cambridge, 2014)



This pair of readings will help you:

- Know more about Singapore's current arts scene.
- Understand the at-times differing views and goals of the government and artists.
- Appreciate the tension between government support (or not) and artists' needs.
- Understand what it takes to support the arts, financially and otherwise, in Singapore.

## Reading 4a

EU4, E5, E6

### Is Singapore an Arts Hub Yet?

*With various government initiatives rolled out and a calendar year chock-full of art-related events, is Singapore realising its vision as an art epicentre?*

Wyn-Lyn Tan, 22 Jan 2015

Lifestyle, The Peak Magazine

London looks to us to deal with traffic congestion. China modelled an industrial town after ours in Jurong. After years of establishing ourselves as an urban infrastructure and business powerhouse, Singapore has a bigger aspiration: to join the ranks of the great arts epicentres of the world, such as London, Milan, Paris and New York where artists want to exhibit at and where connoisseurs go to grow their collections.

It started with the city's first Biennale in 2006. Efforts were ramped up in 2012 when the Government announced it would spend \$274 million over the next five years developing arts and culture. That same year, Gillman Barracks was launched. The government-led art district houses 17 international art galleries, alongside the Centre for Contemporary Art which is a research centre of Nanyang Technological University.

The last Biennale edition in 2013, an anchor event on the nation's artistic calendar, saw a record number of over 560,000 visitors. This year, the much-anticipated National Gallery Singapore, housing the world's largest collection of South-east Asian art, will open its doors. Singapore Pinacothèque de Paris, an offshoot of Paris' largest private museum, is scheduled to open in May at the Fort Canning Arts Centre.

With so much buzz, are these efforts paying off?

Stephanie Fong, director and founder of Fost Gallery, believes so. She says: "Yes, we are building on the foundation of the reputation laid by the Singapore Art Museum, National Museum of Singapore, Asian Civilisations Museum and The Esplanade. We also now have a thriving art fair scene."

Julane Jones, who was a docent with the Asian Civilisations Museum for four years and is now guiding at Gillman Barracks, attests to the change. She says: "When I arrived in Singapore in 2005 (from the US), the art scene was quiet – even dormant. But in the past five years, it seems to have found a pulse and is moving into the next stage. The Government has spent a lot of money to create world-class museum spaces, and expanded at rapid speed in recent years, adding a few new museums, while existing ones have been blessed with extensive renovations and/or additions."

### The Scene Gets Livelier

One such important visual arts initiative is Art Stage Singapore which debuted in 2011. Founder Lorenzo Rudolf, who also started Art Basel Miami Beach and SH Contemporary in Shanghai, says he chose Singapore as his South-east Asian launching pad because "it is

the only other cosmopolitan city (other than Hong Kong) that can support an international art market.”

35 He adds: “I decided to come to Singapore and invest in its art scene, financially and personally, because I believe in this place. Being in the heart of South-east Asia, Singapore is not only the gateway for South-east Asia and South-east Asian artists, galleries and collectors to the international market, but also a bridge linking all these different South-east Asian scenes themselves.” When its upcoming fifth edition opens later this month on Jan 22 at Marina Bay Sands Expo & Convention Centre, visitors can look forward to a top cast of  
40 artists, including Turner Prize-winning duo Gilbert & George who will be showing here for the first time, and new platform programmes dedicated to Russian art, video art and modern art. Over 80 per cent of the 153 galleries from 29 countries are returning exhibitors.

Leading up to Art Stage Singapore will be nine-day festival Singapore Art Week, a joint initiative by the National Arts Council, Economic Development Board and Singapore Tourism  
45 Board. This year will see its biggest line-up ever of around 100 events, from gallery openings, exhibitions, festivals, to tours and talks featuring local and international artists.

Other prominent art fairs that have established themselves here include the Singapore Art Fair which focuses on works from the Middle East, North Africa, and the South and Southeast Asia regions, as well as the Affordable Art Fair.

50 The proliferation is not just limited to large-scale events. Apart from public art fairs, galleries are also sprouting all over Singapore. According to the 2014 Singapore Cultural Statistics, there were 5,486 arts and cultural companies in 2013, compared to 1,260 in 2012.

One of them is Mizuma Gallery from Tokyo, which features Japanese artists as well as introduce new South-east Asian talent. CEO Ryo Wakabayashi, who recently moved to  
55 Singapore, says he chose Singapore over Hong Kong because “the infrastructure and international art projects in Singapore live up to their reputation, and we feel that the regional artists, curators, collectors, galleries, and fairs all recognise that too.”

### Nurture

Interest in an arts education has also increased. In 2008, Singapore opened its first  
60 independent, pre-tertiary school in the School of the Arts (SOTA). This is on top of the country’s two other established art institutions Lasalle College of the Arts and Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts.

According to the 2014 Singapore Cultural Statistics, 5,409 students enrolled in full-time tertiary arts – up from 4,492 in 2012.

65 Then there are grants, arts housing schemes and scholarships offered to help develop individual Singaporean artists. Installation artist Donna Ong, who was given the National Arts Council’s (NAC) Young Artist Award in 2009, acknowledges that the grants and scholarship she has been fortunate enough to receive, have helped her “survive and thrive as an artist.” Benefactor of a \$100,000 Shell-NAC Arts Scholarship, she attended the prestigious  
70 Goldsmiths College at the University of London from 1999 to 2003. Her works have since been sold in Europe.

75 ***“While Singapore becomes a homing site for the arts, it is important that we do not just have a domestic mindset to the arts. (We should) look at how Singapore can play a role globally in the art world. Having Singapore artists, writers, curators and arts leaders working internationally as influencers of global cultural flow will help proposition Singapore as a site to learn from and be part of” – Venka Purushothaman, provost at Lasalle College of the Arts.***

80 Painter Jeremy Sharma too, believes he is “extremely privileged and fortunate” to have got much support from the Government. The Della Butcher Award winner, who also teaches at Lasalle, says: “I can’t complain. I have seen artists in other countries get by with little or no funding and support.

The Singapore government has created a lot of financial schemes and infrastructure in place that artists here may take for granted.”

## 85 **Becoming a Global (Art) Citizen**

Still, there’s more to being a reputed arts hub than government initiatives and the explosion of galleries and art fairs. Singapore has to cast its sight further.

90 “An arts hub is not only about being a destination,” says Venka Purushothaman, provost at Lasalle College of the Arts. “While Singapore becomes a homing site for the arts, it is important that we do not just have a domestic mindset to the arts. (We should) look at how Singapore can play a role globally in the art world. Having Singapore artists, writers, curators and arts leaders working internationally as influencers of global cultural flow will help proposition Singapore as a site to learn from and be part of.”

95 For instance, Singapore can step up engagement with economic powerhouses that it already has ties with, such as China, India, Indonesia and Japan that are also rich in culture and art, Purushothaman says. Singapore must also find important platforms to be seen and engaged in dialogue, like the World Economic Forum’s cultural platform or UNESCO’s work on arts and culture.

100 It is important for Singapore artists to show work abroad, especially in countries with a longer art history “as it puts us in the context of the world,” says Ian Woo, one of Singapore’s leading abstract painters and Master of Arts programme leader of the Faculty of Fine Arts at Lasalle College of the Arts. Having exhibited in Hong Kong, Korea, Japan, and the UK, Woo values the feedback, connections and “insightful conversations” that come out of these shows abroad.

105 Prolific artist and Cultural Medallion Award recipient Milenko Prvacki shares a similar view. Aside from having exhibited extensively overseas, the senior fellow and former dean of the Faculty of Fine Arts at Lasalle College of the Arts, has participated in various artist residencies abroad, such as the Cité Internationale des Arts residency in Paris, and 18th Street Arts Center residency in Santa Monica, Los Angeles.

110 Prvacki, who moved to Singapore from the former Yugoslavia in 1992 and became a Singapore citizen in 2002, says of his experience: “They would organise frequent studio visits, as often as on a daily basis, for prestigious art critics, curators, artists to view the work in process. It is very common to have dialogues and collaboration with other artists and art communities in Los Angeles. In Singapore, the only art institution that has a similar practice  
115 is Centre of Contemporary Arts. In order to be connected with the global contemporary art scene, we need more exchanges between artists from various countries.”

And if we do not seize the momentum now, a world renowned arts hub may never happen, says Rudolf. *The founder of Art Stage Singapore says:*

120 ***“If Singapore understands that it should not act as a closed national scene but also as an open cultural hub, embracing the best of the entire region and having all forces cooperate and support one another, then I think the future belongs to it. All the ingredients are here, we just have to put them together in the right way. Singapore, as an international city, has all the chances to become a global hub but only if it functions globally – that would be its formula to success. We have to understand  
125 contemporary art as a global language; we should not be afraid of leaving the warm***

***nest, and artistically interact and compete with the world. That also means that as a region, we have to support one another in a much stronger way, demonstrating a strong and united region and market to the rest of the art world.”***

130 For the artists who continue to push the envelope, the answer lies perhaps, not so much in achieving this grand ecosystem of an arts hub. Rather, it is to look inward.

135 Woo says: “I never thought of the arts hub. I don’t understand what it’s all about. I don’t want to make work to service a system that is positioned by the government. I fear I may end up making work that caters to a certain assumption. So, to Singapore artists, you make the best work you can make. The most original, the most individualistic that’s unique to you; you just have to be excited about your work. If you make good work, the hub is going to happen anyway.”

### **Points to Ponder/Discussion**

This article presents some things the Singapore government has done to support the arts and the views of some artists.

- What do you think about the local arts scene?
- Should the arts be self-sufficient, or should they be at taxpayers’ expense?
- Based on what you have read above and your own knowledge, do you think the government has done enough to support the local arts scene? If more should be done, what and why?
- Considering that budgets are limited, what arts in particular would you choose to support, and why?

### **Essay Questions**

1. To what extent should the arts in your society focus on local rather than foreign talent? (Cambridge, 2015)
2. Public money should not be wasted on supporting the Arts; they should support themselves.’ Discuss. (Cambridge, 2000)
3. Is investing in the arts ever worthwhile? Discuss the question with reference to your country. (RJ 2009 J2CT)
4. Should the government promote the arts when only the privileged benefit from it? (RJ 2008 J2 CT)

**Why is state funding needed for our arts scene to thrive?**

Olivia Ho | The Straits Times | 24 Jul 2017

It is a universally acknowledged truth that a country in possession of a First World reputation must also have a thriving arts scene. But when it comes to paying for the arts, people are less quick to reach for the bill. And lately, the dreary economic climate means an increasing reluctance to open wallets.

- 5 The arts – which comprise theatre, dance, traditional arts, visual arts, music and literature – in Singapore are mainly funded by the state, unlike in other countries such as the United States, where they are largely supported through private donors and foundations.

- 10 In 2015, according to the Singapore Cultural Statistics report, 80 per cent of arts and heritage funding in Singapore, or \$595.7 million, was provided by the Government through state agencies such as the National Arts Council (NAC).

This includes \$79.4 million under the Cultural Matching Fund, which was set up by the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth to match private cash donations to arts and heritage charities and Institutions of Public Character dollar for dollar.

- 15 The Government's support for the arts takes various forms, from grants and partnerships to industry facilitation and arts housing.

In the 2015/2016 financial year, for instance, \$70.9 million was disbursed through the Grants Framework and \$7.4 million through the Arts Housing Scheme, which was implemented in 1985 to provide affordable spaces to arts groups and artists.

- 20 An NAC spokesman said investing in the creation and appreciation of the arts “does not only add to the national canon of artwork we can be proud of, it also allows the arts on an individual level to entertain and inspire, and provide an avenue for self-expression, learning and reflection”. “On a community and international level, the arts can connect our communities and position Singapore globally,” the spokesman added.

**Other sources of arts funding**

- 25 The remaining support for arts and culture comes from corporate sponsors and individuals.

Last year, donations in cash and kind to the arts scene fell by half to \$64.7 million, down from \$136.1 million in 2015. The gap, said the NAC, was largely due to 2015 being an exceptionally prolific year for arts giving, thanks to Singapore's jubilee celebrations.

- 30 While corporate sponsors gave almost two-thirds less, individual contributions – which totalled \$19.4 million – were double that of the year before. For the first time last year, contributions in kind, which included artwork loans and donations also peaked at \$20.6 million.

Given the number of causes jostling for donors' attention, arts giving tends to fall behind. According to a survey on giving conducted by the NAC last year, 2 per cent of donors in Singapore had given to the arts.

35 The survey polled 1,035 individuals door to door from January to March last year, and 252 companies which had donated to various causes from October 2015 to April last year.

Most of the individuals surveyed cited low awareness as their reason for not donating, while a quarter said they had no interest in the arts.

40 Among those who had not donated in the past 12 months, 16 per cent said they would not consider giving to the arts at all, compared with 11 per cent for community and grassroots, and 10 per cent for religious organisations.

As for businesses, large local companies were most likely to support the arts, with 36 per cent preferring them over other causes, compared with 26 per cent for multinational corporations and 16 per cent for small and medium-sized enterprises.

45 The NAC said that while the state plays a critical role in sustaining the arts, it cannot achieve its mission alone. "The vibrancy in Singapore's arts scene today can be credited to the support of many generous corporate and individual donors who value the impact and role of the arts in all aspects of society."

50 Greater private patronage and corporate sponsorship is needed, it added – whether financially, in kind through organisational or professional expertise, or even through the provision of spaces for the arts community.

### **Why arts practitioners struggle**

It is difficult for those in the arts industries to turn a profit without funding. Most arts practitioners struggle to cover costs as it is.

55 As outgoing Singapore International Festival of Arts artistic director Ong Keng Sen said in a 2015 interview, sponsorship is essential to an artist since the arts are not self-sustaining and may never be, given the small market here.

The richest literary prize in Singapore, the Epigram Books Fiction Prize, is privately funded and struggles each year to raise the prize money.

60 The prize for unpublished manuscripts, which is meant to encourage local writing, awards \$25,000 in cash to the winner and \$5,000 to three other shortlisted writers. With some major sponsors being less forthcoming this year, Epigram has recently turned to crowdfunding, although so far it is less than halfway to raising the money needed to award the prize at the end of this year.

65 While founder Edmund Wee says he intends to go ahead with the prize anyway – digging into his own pockets if need be – a lack of long-term sponsorship could mean this year will be its last.

70 Acquiring funding has become more and more competitive. After the NAC's release of the recipients of its Seed Grant and Major Company scheme in April, some arts groups had to tighten their belts due to funding cuts of less than 10 per cent, following budget reduction across the Government and a number of recipients.

Groups which were dealt cuts or failed to get funding applications approved said they might have to cope by doing fewer shows or outreach, or by cutting their artists' salaries. A total of \$16.34 million has been committed to 63 arts groups this year, up from \$16.2 million last year for 62 groups.

Arts housing is also becoming more expensive, with rental costs at Goodman Arts Centre having risen since last month, while the NAC has cut subsidies for service charges.

Some might argue that the “survival of the fittest” approach should be applied to the arts as well – that it should be left to the free market to determine which arts groups thrive based on the quality of their output.

Certainly, funding needs to be tied to merit to keep standards high. “Art for art's sake” should not mean people are expected to sustain mediocrity simply because it has been tagged as art. But a natural selection approach also overlooks how the arts are needed to experiment, provoke and break boundaries. Relying on the free market would push artists towards populism and commercial production in order to survive.

Singaporeans, with their reputation for utilitarianism, are also not exactly given to spending liberally on the arts to begin with, whatever their quality.

It is also crucial that outreach continues to be a growing aspect of the local arts scene. Arts and culture cannot be the preserve of the elite if they are to enrich a nation.

Low-income groups, children and those with special needs need more avenues through which they can be exposed to the arts.

State funding makes it possible for Singaporeans to go to museums for free and for events such as the biannual Arts In Your Neighbourhood, which takes experiences such as playground theatre and music walks to the heartland to reach wider audiences around the island.

But for financially strapped independent arts groups to not just survive, but also make their offerings affordable for the masses, greater support is needed not just from the public but also the private sphere.

#### Govt arts funding comes with rules attached

The Government is the common source of funding for the arts in Singapore, but an ongoing concern is the way in which state funding comes with strings attached.

Arts practitioners have decried the denial or withdrawal of funds for works that challenge the establishment as an instrument of censorship. The Government, however, has argued that taxpayers' money should not be used to support works that go against perceived national values.

There have been numerous high-profile cases of arts groups or artists losing funding due to an unwillingness to compromise on artistic expression.

In 2011, theatre company Wild Rice had its funding under the National Arts Council (NAC) Major Grant scheme slashed due to its Singapore Theatre Festival, known for its local plays

110	with a tongue-in-cheek take on political themes. Wild Rice went on to land sponsorship for that year's festival from international fund manager Man Investments.
115	In 2015, the NAC withdrew an \$8,000 grant for artist Sonny Liew's satirical graphic novel <i>The Art Of Charlie Chan Hock Chye</i> , because its content "potentially undermines the authority or legitimacy" of the Government. The public attention garnered by the grant withdrawal worked in the book's favour – it went on to become a bestseller.
120	Arts practitioners have called for the funding of the arts to be insulated from social or political pressures. During a parliamentary exchange last year, Nominated MP Kok Heng Leun argued that the arts have intrinsic worth, and should not be viewed only in terms of the political purpose they serve.
	Minister of Culture, Community and Youth Grace Fu responded that there remains a need for "rules of engagement to safeguard the social harmony that we cherish".

**For discussion:**

- 5) What challenges do local arts practitioners face that may warrant arts funding? (*Summary*)
- 6) The writer dismisses the "free market" solution to arts funding (lines 84-86). How far do you agree with her reasoning? (*AQ*)
- 7) To what extent should government funding for the arts come with "rules attached" (line 100)? (*Essay / AQ*)



## **Arts Funding in Singapore**

**Table D-1: Contributions to Arts and Culture**

Year	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015 <sup>^</sup>	2016
<b>Total Contributions (\$mil)</b>	<b>39.9</b>	<b>43.1</b>	<b>45.4</b>	<b>54.8</b>	<b>74.4</b>	<b>152.6</b>	<b>74.3</b>
Artefact Donations	4.6	2.6	1.5	2.1	12.1	0.5	1.4
Cash, In-kind Donations and Sponsorship <sup>^^</sup>	35.3	40.5	43.9	52.7	62.3	152.1	72.9

Source: National Arts Council and National Heritage Board

<sup>^</sup> The high value in 2015 was due to an increase in donations received for Patron of the Arts Awards in celebration of Singapore's 50<sup>th</sup> birthday and due to the establishment of the National Gallery Singapore.

**Notes:**

Figures prior to 2016 have been revised due to updates in the data collection method.

**Table D-2: Government Funding**

Year	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
<b>Total Government Funding (\$mil)</b>	<b>495.9</b>	<b>554.0</b>	<b>541.4</b>	<b>689.4</b>	<b>884.0</b>	<b>936.7</b>	<b>712.7</b>
Arts & Heritage <sup>*</sup>	280.6	344.2	320.4	439.6	495.1	522.7	412.8
Cultural Matching Fund <sup>**</sup>	-	-	-	-	51.9	79.5	19.8
Library <sup>^</sup>	215.3	209.8	221.0	249.8	337.0	334.5	280.1

Source: Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth, and Ministry of Communications and Information. Figures prior to 2012 were from the then Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts.

- <sup>\*</sup> The Arts & Heritage figures are based on financial year, and reflect operating and development expenditure for the arts & heritage sector.
- <sup>\*\*</sup> The Cultural Matching Fund was set up by the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth, to provide dollar-for-dollar matching grants for private cash donations to arts & heritage charities and Institutions of Public Character (IPC).
- <sup>^</sup> The Library figures are based on financial year, and reflect operating and development expenditure for libraries.

**Notes:**

2015 figures have been revised to reflect actual expenditure. 2016 figures are an estimate.

**Overall Source:**

***Singapore Cultural Statistics 2017***

[https://www.mccy.gov.sg/~media/MCCY-corp/Newsroom/Press-Releases/2017/files/Singapore\\_Cultural\\_Statistics\\_2017.ashx](https://www.mccy.gov.sg/~media/MCCY-corp/Newsroom/Press-Releases/2017/files/Singapore_Cultural_Statistics_2017.ashx)

**Table B-1: Ticketed Attendance at Performing Arts\* Events**

Year	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Ticketed Attendance	1,577,737	2,311,313	2,062,124	1,897,162	1,876,922	1,946,322	1,812,697

Source: National Arts Council and People's Association

\* Performing Arts refer to folk, traditional, classical and contemporary forms of dance, music (pop/rock concerts included) and theatre.

^ Ticketed attendance refers to attendance at performing arts events that require a ticket for entry. It includes tickets sold and complimentary tickets issued.

**Table B-2: Ticket Sales for Performing Arts\* Events**

Year	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
<b>Total Tickets Sold**</b>	<b>1,320,100</b>	<b>1,856,400</b>	<b>1,711,500</b>	<b>1,502,900</b>	<b>1,482,289</b>	<b>1,562,404</b>	<b>1,398,857</b>
Music	562,000	589,400	645,400	593,300	611,264	728,305	639,713
Dance	56,700	104,700	82,800	100,600	75,661	75,973	70,874
Theatre	692,200	1,148,400	965,200	800,400	783,594	745,171	677,909
Others	9,200	13,900	18,100	8,600	11,970	12,955	10,361
<b>Total Gross Takings (\$mil)^</b>	<b>91.9</b>	<b>166.5</b>	<b>144.7</b>	<b>122.6</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>121.8</b>	<b>89.38</b>

Source: National Arts Council

\* Performing Arts refer to folk, traditional, classical and contemporary forms of dance, music (pop/rock concerts included) and theatre

\*\* Figures reflect tickets sold through Sistic and Gatecrash from 2010 to 2012 and Sistic in 2013. Figures from 2014 onwards include tickets sold for performing arts events held at the Singapore Sports Hub. The figures do not include tickets sold through Ticketcharge/Tickets.com and other site-specific or independent ticketing service providers.

^ Figures do not include Singapore Sports Hub.

**Table B-6: Museum Roundtable Visitorship**

Year	2010	2011	2012^	2013^^	2014^^^	2015#	2016##
Total Museum Roundtable Visitorship*	6,417,133	6,854,418	7,034,100	6,979,612	6,159,830	7,262,803	8,357,178

Source: National Heritage Board

\* Total Museums Roundtable visitorship includes visitorship to both public and private museums.

^ Figure for 2012 excludes Chinatown Heritage Centre, Red Dot Design Museum and Infocomm Experience Centre (iExperience Centre)

^^ Figure for 2013 excludes Chinatown Heritage Centre, Grassroots Heritage Centre, NHG Polyclinics' Gallery of Memories, Tan Swie Hian Museum, Kong Hiap Memorial Museum and Fuk Tak Shi Museum.

^^^ Figure for 2014 excludes Chinatown Heritage Centre, Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum, Red Dot, Battle Box, NHG Polyclinics' Gallery of Memories, Tan Swie Hian Museum and Fuk Tak Chi Museum.

# Figure for 2015 excludes Chinatown Heritage Centre, Singapore Coins & Notes Museum, Grassroots Heritage Centre, NHG Polyclinics' Gallery of Memories, Fuk Tak Chi Museum, Tiger Live, Nei Xue Tang, Hua Song Museum and Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum. Figures have been updated to include National Gallery Singapore, which was opened in November 2015.

## Memories at Old Ford Factory was closed in 2016.

This reading will help you:

- Understand some of the value attributed to an arts education.
- Recognise some of the aims behind Singapore's attempt to promote arts education, as well as understand some of the challenges face.

## Reading 5

EU1, EU6

### The full measure of an arts education

Adapted from an article by Yuen Sin in The Straits Times, 1 Jun 2017

*A school for the arts is not a factory that churns out artists, but a place for young people to discover how the arts enhance their learning.*

News last month that fewer than three in 10 School of the Arts (Sota) graduating students go on to pursue arts-related university courses stirred debate, with some saying this was too low a figure and asking if taxpayers' dollars were well spent in funding such a school.

5 Those remarks invited heartfelt responses from a handful of Sota alumni and their parents, who defended the school and its programme and detailed the tremendous benefits of an arts education.

10 Indeed, we need to consider why Sota was set up in the first place. When it was first mooted in 2004, the aim was not to set up a vocational school aimed solely at producing arts practitioners. Instead, such a school would give students at the pre-tertiary level a strong foundation in the arts, plugging a gap in mainstream schools.

15 Sota students, said the committee that drew up the 2004 report on a School for the Arts, would be "better positioned to pursue higher education in the arts or arts-related fields, or apply their artistic and creative capabilities in other fields". That, in turn, would support Singapore's plans to develop its own artistic talents in its push to position itself as a "global city for the arts", and provide new opportunities for those with creative aspirations as society matures.

### What numbers don't say

20 Sota students embark on a six-year programme which culminates in an International Baccalaureate diploma. In the first two years, students are also exposed to art forms other than the one they are specialising in. They also study a full slate of academic subjects, including science and mathematics.

25 The arts are often integrated into the academic subjects and that allows students to approach what they are learning from multiple perspectives. So a music student may, for example, demonstrate during physics class how the pitch of a violin is adjusted and how that corresponds to sound frequency. Dance students may apply the principles of cultural anthropology to carry out research on different dance cultures.

As the Sota committee said in its 2004 report, an arts education can help students develop critical thought and creative expression, nurture self-development and leadership qualities, and also enrich their study of other subjects.

30 Whether or not a Sota student pursues a university degree in the arts is a poor indicator of the school's success. Some Sota alumni have moved into law or the humanities after graduation, but continue to contribute to the arts scene, with some starting arts education programmes and others founding literary magazines. Yet others apply their ability to think critically and independently in the non-arts disciplines they have ventured into.

35 All this is consistent with the national push to encourage lifelong learning and with the SkillsFuture movement which emphasises that learning is a personal endeavour and that every person should be given the autonomy to decide when and how to apply the skills and knowledge they have acquired, and have the flexibility to switch from one industry to another depending on interest and market demand.

#### 40 **Too early to judge**

As Sota is a very young school just approaching its 10th year, it may be premature to size up its impact on society at this stage.

The proportion of students entering arts courses at university excludes students who left Sota before completing the six-year programme to pursue tertiary studies in the arts, at institutions like the National University of Singapore's Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music or the Central School of Ballet in London, as well as those who return to work full-time in the arts sector after working professionally in another discipline.

SMU Associate Professor Margaret Chan says: "It should not be seen as a failure of Sota that their graduates go on to non-arts courses." She studied business administration at university before becoming an actress and earning a PhD in performance studies later. "Art is about meaning-making; it is understanding ourselves and society, reaching into ourselves and out to others," she adds.

#### **Room for change**

The debate has, however, served a useful purpose in surfacing questions about the teaching of the arts and how arts careers are perceived. That is partly due to reports that a sizeable number of teachers have left Sota of late, with some citing a disconnect between educators and management on how the arts should be taught.

Mr Charles Tee, a parent of a Sota alumnus, also wrote to The Straits Times Forum to register his unhappiness that Sota seems to be chasing after academic excellence at the expense of artistic development.

A related issue is the widespread perception among Singaporeans, including some parents of Sota students, that to pursue a career in the arts is to court unemployment and hardship.

Sota alumna Faye Tan, 21, who left Sota after four years for the Rambert School of Ballet and Contemporary Dance in London, says young people are discouraged by pessimistic labels attached to arts careers, such as "risky, difficult, poor and unappreciated". Now a full-time company artist and digital marketing manager at contemporary dance company Frontier Danceland, she says there is also no need for Sota alumni to limit themselves to pursuing the arts as a hobby just because they are not training full-time or extensively in the arts.

Theatre practitioner and Nominated Member of Parliament Kok Heng Leun believes there is no lack of career options in the arts. But society's perceptions of artists need to change, he says. "We need artists to be respected. A lot of people still see artists as just entertainers or, for some, trouble-makers because they tackle difficult issues. Artists need to be seen as being



as important as scientists, economists and entrepreneurs,” he says. It is also important that people respect artistic work, he adds, as that reflects their appreciation of the time and effort the artist has invested in art making.

### Paths for different talents

At the official opening of Sota in 2011, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong forecast that many Sota graduates would go on to professions not directly related to aesthetics, such as medicine or engineering, but maintained that an education in the arts is of value in itself.

National Institute of Education don Jason Tan notes that the school also provides an avenue for pedagogical innovation. Sota, he says, can develop creative models for imparting skills and content through the arts that other schools can consider adopting. To pin the value of such a school to the percentage of students that go on to pursue arts degrees is reductionist. A better approach is to see where a Sota education is working so as to draw out lessons for other educators and schools, and critique those aspects that are not working and in need of change.

There will always be a place for the arts in society, and it is fitting that young people who are eager for an arts education have access to a secondary school that offers them just that.

### **For discussion:**

- According to the article, what are the benefits of having a school for the arts in Singapore? (Summary)
- How far do you agree that it is a waste of taxpayers’ money if Sota graduates do not go on to pursue university degrees in the arts?
- The article presents two perspectives of an arts career in Singapore: “to pursue a career in the arts is to court unemployment and hardship” (line 63) vs. “there is no lack of career options in the arts” (line 71). Which view do you support and why?

### **Essay Question:**

Is investing in the arts ever worthwhile? Discuss the question with reference to your country. (RJ 2009 J2CT)

## **Reading 5 – Appendix**

### **Enrolment in Arts Studies in Singapore**

Table C-3: Enrolment in School of the Arts

Year	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
<b>Total No. of Students</b>	<b>593</b>	<b>773</b>	<b>934</b>	<b>1,004</b>	<b>1,058</b>	<b>1,079</b>	<b>1,120</b>
Film	-	-	7	39	32	25	29
Music	117	138	165	158	160	159	161
Dance	111	143	166	181	186	194	190
Theatre	131	180	218	225	247	252	243
Visual Arts	234	312	378	401	433	449	444
Literary Arts	-	-	-	-	-	-	20
Others	-	-	-	-	-	-	33

Source: School of the Arts, Singapore

**Table C-1: Full-time Enrolment in Tertiary Arts Courses**

Year	2010	2011	2012	2013*	2014	2015	2016
<b>Total Enrolment</b>	<b>3,637</b>	<b>3,823</b>	<b>4,530</b>	<b>5,470</b>	<b>5,584</b>	<b>5,457</b>	<b>5,460</b>
Diploma	2,267	2,415	3,005	3,682	3,724	3,657	3,624
Undergraduate	1,165	1,224	1,358	1,617	1,689	1,614	1,638
Post-graduate	205	184	167	171	171	186	198

Source: National Arts Council

\* Film figures included from 2013.

**Notes:**

Figures from 2014 onwards have been updated with latest figures.

In 2015 the Diploma in Music was added and three new master programmes were added (Master of Music, Master of Asian Arts Histories, and Masters of Arts in Pedagogy).

Overall Source:

**Singapore Cultural Statistics 2017**

[https://www.mccy.gov.sg/~media/MCCY-corp/Newsroom/Press-Releases/2017/files/Singapore\\_Cultural\\_Statistics\\_2017.ashx](https://www.mccy.gov.sg/~media/MCCY-corp/Newsroom/Press-Releases/2017/files/Singapore_Cultural_Statistics_2017.ashx)

These next readings – 6(a) and 6(b) – will help you:

- Appreciate the tension between would-be public artists and local authorities.
- Examine the various perspectives towards the acceptability of public art.

**Reading 6(a)**

**EU4**

**Strict Singapore divided by arrest of its own Banksy**

*Online wave of support for artist Samantha Lo forces the city to confront its puritan image*

**Peter Beaumont**

Sun 10 Jun 2012, The Guardian

In Hoxton or New York, it might be regarded as commonplace – witty stencils and stickers posted by an artist around public spaces. In Singapore, however, a city obsessed with order and where "vandals" can be flogged, 27-year-old Samantha Lo – the so-called "Sticker Lady" – has inspired a massive online campaign after being arrested for posting stickers.

- Lo, founder of an online arts magazine, has been arrested for sticking messages on traffic signal buttons, including "Press to Time Travel" or "Press to Stop Time", as well as on suspicion of painting messages on roads reading "My Grandfather Road" – a Singaporean pun on bad driving and, some believe, the out-of-touch government of Singapore.

- Lo's arrest, which has been condemned by more than 14,000 people who have signed an online petition calling for leniency in the way she is treated, has triggered deep soul-searching in the city state, which is infamous for its enforcement of strict social order and banned the sale of chewing gum to keep its pavements clean.

- If charged under Singapore's draconian 1966 vandalism law, Lo could face up to three years in jail and a \$2,000 (£1,000) fine. Men who are convicted, even of first offences, also receive three strokes of the cane.

Lo's stickers first appeared earlier this year, and included a monochrome image of an older man stylised in black-and-white, with the word "Limpeh" – meaning "your father" – which is sometimes used as a rude phrase in Singapore. Some have suggested that the man bears a resemblance to Lee Kuan Yew, Singapore's founding statesman.

20 While Lo herself was unavailable for comment, an online petition has attracted a large number of comments criticising Singapore's repressive laws. "Creativity requires a little chaos," wrote one poster, while another, named Gene Ho, argues: "I think it's tastefully done. Not political nor damaging to the nation. In fact, by issuing a fine or caning sentence shows just how tight-assed and conservative the nation is. Supporting the arts you say? Why  
25 not open up your minds first. Laugh at yourselves a little and maybe you will really understand what art is. It's not just ballet or drama or a *che che* symphonic event. It's more than that. So take the stick out of your asses and let the girl go. She's helped a lot of creatives open up."

30 In a statement, however, Singapore's police insisted, "the case is classified as vandalism", adding that offenders would be dealt with severely.

Defending the tough line, a police spokesman told a Singaporean website that it had diverted "substantial resources to identify the suspect involved" and carried out "intensive inquiries and legwork".

35 "This is on top of the considerable time, effort and cost to clean up the roads and affected areas. Vandalising public property is a very irresponsible act. Offenders will be dealt with in accordance with the law."

40 In the escalating row over her treatment – in a country where locksmiths and other small businesses regularly put up advertising stickers but are rarely prosecuted – Lo has attracted the support of several members of Singapore's parliament, among them Janice Koh, who has compared Lo's work with that of the British street artist [Banksy](#). She called on the authorities to handle the case "with a light touch".

45 *Koh said: "It is almost impossible to talk about developing a culturally vibrant, creative or lovable city, without some tolerance for those slightly messy activities that sometimes challenge the rules. For Singapore, it would be useful to make a distinction between this kind of art and outright graffiti or vandalism that seeks to deliberately destroy public property for its own sake."*

Not all those who have commented publicly, however, have been so tolerant, with a number calling for Lo to be punished under the vandalism law.

50 One, Ann Hee Kyet, insisted: "This is definitely vandalism. Stop hiding behind the excuse of art. The stickers are creative and cheeky, in the style of schoolgirl pranks. If we allow such acts to go unpunished, more people would be encouraged to try their own versions."

## **Reading 6(b)**

### **Gold stairs earn praise but are out of step with rules**

*Town council says student's effort to 'beautify' block unauthorised*

By Adrian Lim, 8 March 2017, The Straits Times

A staircase paved with gold foil at a Housing Board block in Jalan Besar has earned an art student praise from netizens, but is reportedly being called an "unauthorised" deed by the town council.

- 5 Ms Priyageetha Dia claimed responsibility on Facebook for the work, which took about five hours to complete, writing that the "intervention of the gold finally reverberated against the ever-lifeless and grey architecture on the 20th floor of my block".

Photos of the "golden staircase" in the Jalan Rajah block first surfaced on the online forum Reddit two days ago, and then citizen journalism website Stomp.

- 10 According to Ms Priyageetha's Facebook profile, she is a student at at the Lasalle College of the Arts.

Today newspaper reported the Jalan Besar Town Council as saying that while it appreciated her "desire to enhance her surrounding space", the act was unauthorised under the town council's by-laws. However, it reportedly said it wants to explore ways in which it and Ms Priyageetha can work together.

- 15 When contacted by The Straits Times, the town council's property officer, who identified himself only as Mr Md Firdaus, said that the case was still under investigation. The town council did not say if the gold foil would be removed from the staircase.

Ms Priyageetha said in her Facebook post that she had been thinking about decorating the staircase for a month and was apprehensive of the consequences.

- 20 "I consider this work as art and not vandalism," she wrote. Despite the laws, she felt that she had not defaced anything, but had enhanced her space and surroundings. "My work does not seek to obliterate a public space; vandalism in all sense has no respect for another individual," she added. Ms Priyageetha declined comment when contacted by ST.

- 25 At least one of her neighbours has given the work the thumbs up. Ms Raine Chong, 28, an architect, feels the town council should let the golden staircase remain. Besides being the subject of a conversation starter among neighbours, Ms Chong said the artwork held a deeper meaning to her. She noted that her late grandmother, together with 10 children, had been relocated to the Jalan Rajah block from the slums. "It was their first proper home. This golden staircase, as you can put it, is the 'stairway to heaven'."

- 30 This is not the first time that a work in a public space that claims to be art has fallen afoul of the law. On March 2, ST reported that a pagoda-like tower of psychedelic toys, figurines and knick-knacks, erected late last year at a void deck in Yishun, had been described by some as an art installation worthy of a place in the Singapore Biennale. But it is gone now after the authorities, worried about fire safety, stepped in.

#### **For discussion:**

- i) Do you consider the Sticker Lady's arrest justified? Do you think Ms Priyageetha's creation should receive the same response from the authorities? Why or why not?
- ii) With regard to public art, what does society accept and what does society not accept, and who ultimately decides what is acceptable or not?



iii) In the five years between the two readings, how much, if anything, has changed with regard to Singapore authorities' attitude(s) towards public art? Substantiate your view.

This pair of readings will help you:

- Know more about the value of music to people and societies.
- Consider what the difference is between music and noise.

## **Reading 4a**

**EU3, EU5**

### **Why it's time to turn the music off**

*It's time to switch the music off in order to rediscover its true value, says Roger Scruton.*  
BBC [Magazine](#) 15 November 2015

In almost every public place today the ears are assailed by the sound of pop music. In shopping malls, public houses, restaurants, hotels and elevators the ambient sound is not human conversation but the music disgorged into the air by speakers – usually invisible and inaccessible speakers that cannot be punished for their impertinence. Some places brand themselves with their own signature sound – folk, jazz or excerpts from the Broadway musicals. For the most part, however, the prevailing music is of an astounding banality – it is there in order not to be really there. It is a background to the business of consuming things, a surrounding nothingness on which we scribble the graffiti of our desires. The worst forms of this music – sometimes known, after the trade name, as Muzak – are produced without the intervention of musicians, being put together on a computer from a repertoire of standard effects.

The background sounds of modern life are therefore less and less human. Rhythm, which is the sound of life, has been largely replaced by electrical pulses, produced by a machine programmed to repeat itself ad infinitum, and to thrust its booming bass notes into the very bones of the victim. Whole areas of civic space in our society are now policed by this sound, which drives anybody with the slightest feeling for music to distraction, and ensures that for many of us a visit to the pub or a meal in a restaurant have lost their residual meaning. These are no longer social events, but experiments in endurance, as you shout at each other over the deadly noise.

There are two reasons why this vacuous music has flown into every public space. One is the vast change in the human ear brought about by the mass production of sound. The other is the failure of the law to protect us from the result. For our ancestors music was something that you sat down to listen to, or which you made for yourself. It was a ceremonial event, in which you participated, either as a passive listener or as an active performer. Either way you were giving and receiving life, sharing in something of great social significance.

With the advent of the gramophone, the radio and now the iPod, music is no longer something that you must make for yourself, nor is it something that you sit down to listen to. It follows you about wherever you go, and you switch it on as a background. It is not so much listened to as overheard. The banal melodies and mechanical rhythms, the stock harmonies recycled in song after song, these things signify the eclipse of the musical ear. For many people music is no longer a language shaped by our deepest feelings, no longer a place of refuge from the tawdriness and distraction of everyday life, no longer an art in which gripping ideas are followed to their distant conclusions. It is simply a carpet of sound, designed to bring all thought and feeling down to its own level lest something serious might be felt or said.

And there is no law against it. You are rightly prevented from polluting the air of a restaurant with smoke; but nothing prevents the owner from inflicting this far worse pollution on his customers – pollution that poisons not the body but the soul. Of course, you can ask for the music to be turned off. But you will be met by blank and even hostile stares. What kind of a  
40 weirdo is this, who wants to impose his will on everyone? Who is he to dictate the noise levels? Such is the usual response. Background music is the default position. It is no longer silence to which we return when we cease to speak, but the empty chatter of the music-box. Silence must be excluded at all cost, since it awakens you to the emptiness that looms on the edge of modern life, threatening to confront you with the dreadful truth, that you have  
45 nothing whatever to say. On the other hand, if we knew silence for what once it was, as the plastic material that is shaped by real music, then it would not frighten us at all.

I don't think we should underestimate the tyranny exerted over the human brain by pop. The constant repetition of musical platitudes, at every moment of the day and night, leads to addiction. It also has a dampening effect on conversation. I suspect that the increasing  
50 inarticulateness of the young, their inability to complete their sentences, to find telling phrases or images, or to say anything at all without calling upon the word "like" to help them out, has something to do with the fact that their ears are constantly stuffed with cotton wool. Round and round in their heads go the chord progressions, the empty lyrics and the impoverished fragments of tune, and boom goes the brain box at the start of every bar.

The magical encounter with the Beethoven quartet, the Bach suite, the Brahms symphony, in which your whole being is gripped by melodic and harmonic ideas and taken on a journey through the imaginary space of music – that experience which lies at the heart of our civilisation and which is an incomparable source of joy and consolation to all those who know it – is no longer a universal resource. It has become a private eccentricity, something  
60 that a dwindling body of oldies cling to, but which is regarded by many of the young as irrelevant. Increasingly young ears cannot reach out to this enchanted world, and therefore turn away from it. The loss is theirs, but you cannot explain that to them, any more than you can explain the beauty of colours to someone who is congenitally blind.

Is there a remedy? Yes, I think there is. The addictive ear, dulled by repetition, is shut tight as a clam around its pointless treasures. But you can prise it open with musical instruments. Put a young person in a position to make music and not just to hear it and immediately the ear begins to recover from its lethargy. By teaching children to play musical instruments, we acquaint them with the roots of music in human life.

The next step is to introduce the idea of judgment. The belief that there is a difference  
70 between good and bad, meaningful and meaningless, profound and vapid, exciting and banal – this belief was once fundamental to musical education. But it offends against political correctness. Today there is only my taste and yours. The suggestion that my taste is better than yours is elitist, an offence against equality. But unless we teach children to judge, to discriminate, to recognise the difference between music of lasting value and mere  
75 ephemera, we give up on the task of education. Judgment is the precondition of true enjoyment, and the prelude to understanding art in all its forms.

The good news is that, in their hearts, people are aware of this. All who have had the experience of teaching music appreciation know it to be so. The first step is to introduce the precious commodity of silence, so that your students are listening with open ears to the  
80 cosmos, and are beginning to forget their addictive pleasures. Then you play to them the things that you love. They will be bewildered at first. After all, how can this old geezer sit still for 50 minutes listening to something that hasn't got a beat or a tune? Then you discuss the things that they love. Had they noticed, for example, that Lady Gaga in "Poker Face" stays for most of the tune on one note? Is that real melody? After a while they will see that they  
85 have in fact been making judgments all along – it is just that they were making the wrong ones. When Metallica appeared at the 2014 Glastonbury festival there was a wake-up

moment of this kind – the recognition that these guys, unlike so many who had performed there, actually had something to say. Yes, there are distinctions of quality, even in the realm of pop.

- 90 The next stage is to get the students to perform – to sing in unison, and then in parts. Very soon they will understand that music is not a blanket with which to shut out communication, but a form of communication in itself. And gradually they will know the place of this great art form in the world that they have inherited. Our civilisation was made by music and the musical tradition that we have inherited is as worthy of praise as all our other achievements
- 95 in art, science, religion and politics. This musical tradition speaks for itself but to hear it you must clear the air of noise.

#### **Points to Ponder/Discussion**

- How does the writer differentiate between music and noise?
- Critically, what does he say about the idea of judgment in music nowadays?
- What does the writer think good music is?
- What do you think good music is?

#### **Essay Questions**

1. Is contemporary music nothing but noise?
2. 'Contemporary music has no artistic value.' Is this a fair comment? (Cambridge, 2008)
3. Consider the value and appeal of popular music and film.

### **Reading 4b**

**EU3**

#### **Songs of Black Lives Matter**

*(excerpted and adapted from The Rolling Stones, July 2016)*

*How musicians have added their voices to the growing movement*

Two years after the death of Eric Garner at the hands of NYPD officers, "I can't breathe" remains perhaps the most disturbing phrase in modern American history. Which makes it all the more courageous that Elisha and Steven Flagg, Garner's siblings, refuse to let the tragic day they lost their brother fade into history. This month, they released "I Can't Breathe," their second song commemorating Garner, joining countless other musicians who have pledged their support to the Black Lives Matter cause.

The movement has politicized popular artists and helped to shake the commercial cobwebs from hip-hop and R&B. During the past four years, high-profile musicians have issued everything from anthemic rallying cries (Beyoncé's fearless "Freedom") to open-ended conversation-starters (Macklemore and Ryan Lewis' "White Privilege II"). Artists such as D'Angelo and Kendrick Lamar emerged with readymade, multifaceted statement albums; smaller artists like Houston MC Z-Ro and icons like Prince released songs in response to various instances of police brutality; and even typically apolitical megastars like Ariana Grande and Usher have joined the outspoken chorus.

A new generation of artists are addressing racism, violence and disillusionment in a way that hasn't been heard in decades. Here are three of the many powerful new protest anthems that have come out of the Black Lives Matter era.

#### **#1 Common feat. John Legend, "Glory"**

"Glory" was written for *Selma*, a film chronicling the Civil Rights era, but the gospel-infused song proved just as relevant in the face modern-day tumult. During Common's verses on the Oscar-winning track, the rapper and actor connects moments like Rosa Parks refusing to sit on the back of the bus to the protests in Ferguson.

**Key Lyric:** "That's why Rosa sat on the bus/That's why we walk through Ferguson with our hands up/When it go down, we woman and man up/They say 'Stay Down' and we stand up."

## **#2 Lauryn Hill, "Black Rage (Sketch)"**

In the wake of the Michael Brown shooting, R&B singer Lauryn Hill reprised a powerful song about the strife of the African American community that she's performed live since at least 2012. "Black Rage" reworks "My Favorite Things," the alliterative show tune from *The Sound of Music*, to show how hatred spirals to dark places.

**Key Lyric:** "Black rage is founded on two thirds a person/Rapings and beatings and suffering that worsens/Black human packages tied up in strings/Black rage can come from all these kings of things."

## **#3 J. Cole, "Be Free"**

Like many other young black men across the country, J. Cole saw himself in victims like Michael Brown, feeling like it could have been him, a friend or a family member in a similar situation. Cole responded to such an intense emotion with the passionate, heartbreaking "Be Free," which he released in the wake of the unarmed, nonviolent Brown's death at the hands of a white police officer.

"We become distracted. We become numb. I became numb. But not anymore. That coulda been me, easily. It could have been my best friend... I made a song. This is how we feel," Cole wrote in a statement about the song.

**Key Lyric:** "Can you tell me why/Every time I step outside I see my ni\*\*\*\* die/I'm lettin' you know/That there ain't no gun they make that can kill my soul/Oh, no."

For the full list of 22 songs, go to: <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/pictures/songs-of-black-lives-matter-22-new-protest-anthems-20160713>

### **Points to Ponder/Discussion**

Vox journalist Brigitte Henwood wrote, "as long as people have been fed up with the status quo, they've been singing about it...protest songs usually fall under two major categories: politically charged, topical songs taking issue with the government, or culturally focused songs aimed at injustices facing marginalized groups.

- Why do you think music is a powerful medium for anti-establishment or protest themes?
- Research and share with your classmates one other protest song addressing another political issue / instance of social injustice.

### **Essay Question**

1. Is contemporary music nothing but noise?

This reading will help you:

- Appreciate the controversial and polarising nature of some art.
- Consider the underlying reasons which fuel these conflicts.

## Reading 10

EU2, EU3

### Guggenheim Museum Is Criticized for Pulling Animal Artworks

By Robin Pogrebin and Sopan Deb, September 26, 2017

*Sun Yuan and Peng Yu's "Dogs That Cannot Touch Each Other" (2003), a seven-minute video with eight American pit bulls on eight treadmills. The work was one of three pulled from a coming show at the Guggenheim. Credit Galleria Continua, San Gimignano, Beijing, Les Moulins, Habana. (View a still of the exhibit here:*

<https://static01.nyt.com/images/2017/09/27/arts/27GUGGENHEIM1/27GUGGENHEIM1-master768.jpg>)

Artists and museums are often in the thick of free speech debates — think of Rudolph W. Giuliani's battle with the Brooklyn Museum over a Virgin Mary artwork with elephant dung and more recently a fight over an exhibit that evoked Emmett Till's mutilated corpse. Typically the art world holds its ground, emerging bruised but resolute.

- 5 But in two recent controversies, the protesters seem to be winning.

10 On Monday, the Guggenheim decided to pull three major works from a highly anticipated exhibition after pressure from animal-rights supporters and others over the show "Art and China After 1989: Theater of the World." This, together with the Walker Art Center's recent move to dismantle Sam Durant's sculpture "Scaffold" in response to protests, has art leaders concerned that museums are setting worrisome precedents when threatened with organized pressure tactics.

15 "When an art institution cannot exercise its right for freedom of speech, that is tragic for a modern society," the artist Ai Weiwei said in a telephone interview, referring to the Guggenheim's decision. "Pressuring museums to pull down artwork shows a narrow understanding about not only animal rights but also human rights."

20 The three works in the Guggenheim show, which opens Oct. 6, were created between 1993 and 2003 and were intended to symbolically depict oppression in China. One video, "Dogs That Cannot Touch Each Other," shows four pairs of pit bulls on nonmotorized treadmills, trying to fight even as they struggle to touch. Another video, "A Case Study of Transference," shows two pigs mating in front of an audience. And an installation — "Theater of the World," a central work of the show — features hundreds of live crickets, lizards, beetles, snakes, and other insects and reptiles under an overhead lamp.

25 Protesters marched outside the museum over the weekend, and [an online petition](#) demanded "cruelty-free exhibits" at the Guggenheim. The museum said in a [statement](#) Monday that the works were being removed "out of concern for the safety of its staff, visitors and participating artists." The museum added: "Freedom of expression has always been and will remain a paramount value of the Guggenheim."

30 A museum spokeswoman, asked to describe any threats or security issues, including whether the police had been notified, declined to discuss specifics. But the spokeswoman, Sarah Eaton, added, "The tone in both the petition comments and the social media postings, calls and emails was markedly different from what we've seen before and required us to take the threats very seriously."

35 The Guggenheim has also been a target of protesters in recent years over its decision to build a museum in Abu Dhabi despite widespread concerns about labor conditions there. The Guggenheim has not withdrawn those plans.

For many artists and museum professionals, the latest moves at the Guggenheim and the Walker amount to an artistic capitulation in the face of heightened political sensitivities that have been amplified by social media.

40 "Museums are here to show works that are difficult, uncomfortable, provocative," said Tom Eccles, executive director of the Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard College. "The chilling effect of this of course is museums will now look to make exhibitions that won't in any way offend."

Similarly, PEN America called the Guggenheim's decision "a major blow to artistic freedom."

45 Others say the Guggenheim should have used the controversy as a moment to engage the public about difficult art.

"It's just surprising that there was no call to see the side of the artists," Mohini Dutta, a transmedia designer who teaches at Syracuse University, wrote in an email. "It's sad, but not surprising that a populist institution like the Guggenheim caved, instead of using it as an opportunity to have a larger dialogue about consent, living props and uncomfortable art."

50 In the case of the Walker, Dakota Indian leaders argued that Mr. Durant's two-story structure in the Minneapolis Sculpture Garden — which aimed to evoke gallows throughout United States history — brought back painful memories and trivialized the executions of the United States-Dakota war in 1862.

55 More often in the past, museums have resisted such pressure. In March, a small group of protesters blocked Dana Schutz's painting in the Whitney Biennial based on open-coffin photographs of the mutilated body of Till, the teenager who was lynched by two white men in Mississippi in 1955. They objected to a white artist's using — and potentially profiting from — an image of violence against a black person and urged that the painting not only be removed from the show but also destroyed. The Whitney kept the painting on view.

60 Some applauded the Guggenheim's decision.

"It's the right thing to do," said Stephen F. Eisenman, an art history professor at Northwestern University who has written extensively about the ethics of using animals in art. "The works are cruel and support cruelty and give sanction to animal abuse, and it's right that they should pull them."

65 Mr. Eisenman said the Guggenheim should have gone even further in correcting its errors and issue an apology "for sanctioning such abuse." Instead, he argued, museum officials "covered up what they've done by a claim that they did so on the grounds of security."

70 Ingrid Newkirk, the president of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, who had called on Richard Armstrong, the Guggenheim's director, to remove the artwork, also commended the museum "for withdrawing these vile acts of cruelty masked as creativity."

"China has no laws protecting animals, so withdrawing these pieces may help the country and its artists recognize that animals are not props and that they deserve respect," she said.

75 Controversial art installations and even some paintings regularly prompt an outcry. The Brooklyn Museum faced off against Mayor Giuliani over Chris Ofili's Virgin Mary. In the current Venice Biennale, some have objected to the use of Amazonian Huni Kuin tribe members in the artist Ernesto Neto's tent and to the artist Olafur Eliasson's use of Venice's migrants in his workshop installation. In both cases, the artwork remained in place.

The Dobermans used by Anne Imhof in the German Pavilion at the Venice Biennale did not provoke high-profile objections; she won this year's top prize.

80 But Sarah Cohen, an art historian at the University at Albany whose research focuses on artistic representations of animals, questioned why the Guggenheim included the works at all.

85 "The curators themselves do not appear to have considered very deeply the problem of humans forcing certain behaviors in animals," she said in an email. "Nor did they apparently stop to consider that using pigs as performers to 'inform' human spectators about their cultural hangups is a shopworn strategy — as old as dancing bears and the circus."

"In my opinion," she added, "the exploitation of animals to make artistic points is, well, bad art."

#### **Points to Ponder/Discussion**

- Do you consider the three major works the Guggenheim Museum removed as art?
- What were the artist's intention? Is this 'bad art' disguised as creativity?
- The protestors demanded 'cruelty-free exhibits'. To what extent is this justified when there are many other instances where animal rights are also violated? [Think of circus, bullfighting, animal testing in the labs, force-feeding ducks for foie gras, dog meat festival, etc.]
- Should museums be places to display works that are 'difficult, uncomfortable, provocative'? Why or why not?

#### **Essay Question**

1. 'Different for the sake of being different.' Is this a fair assessment of the arts? (RI Y5 Promo 2015)